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READER

THE HOUSING ISSUE

THIS WEEK

CHICAGO READER | SEPTEMBER 17, 2020 | VOLUME 49, NUMBER 44

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Time to get weird with mustard beer

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A Skokie dispensary features dozens of varieties of flower.

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View from the Indiana Avenue bridge over the Calumet River JOHN GREENFIELD

TRANSPORTATION

Margin biker

A challenging and memorable bike ride around Chicago's exact city limits

By John Greenfield

Some people probably think of me as the Perimeter King of Chicago. Along with many other trips involving cycling the outer edge of places—Illinois, Lake Michigan, three-quarters of the continental U.S.—for the better part of a decade I led the annual Chicago Perimeter Ride. That event typically drew about 100 people for a leisurely all-day-and-evening pedal around the city.

But I've suffered from imposter syndrome. While the Perimeter Ride was always a blast, it was actually a very streamlined route that came nowhere close to tracing the actual complex, zigzagging city limits.

So for years I've been meaning to make things right by biking the exact border of Chicago, or as close as possible without risking being flattened by a semi driver. The COVID quarantine, when entertainment options are limited, seemed like an ideal time to do it. I planned to spread out the trip over two days, spending a night away from home, so I'd basically be taking a vacation solely within the city limits.

I ruled out pedaling around O'Hare, since that would involve miles on a nightmarish seven-lane stretch of Touhy. I also decided not to bother tracing the outlines of Norridge and Harwood Heights, those suburbs that are oddly embedded within Chicago's northwest side for long-forgotten political reasons. And where the border is a busy main street, and there's a chill, leafy residential road parallel to it nearby, I'd take that instead, to ensure my journey was more joyride than hellride, as the late Wesley Willis would say.

Around noon on a 91-degree August Saturday, I start my 116-mile trip on the Lakefront Trail at Montrose, with a counterclockwise route planned for optimal shoreline views. Pedaling east toward the park path that

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hugs crescent-shaped Montrose Beach, I'm annoyed to see that, although the local beach bar is open and bustling, lifeguards are still shooing beachgoers off the sand as part of Mayor Lightfoot's dubious pandemic shoreline safety strategy. The following Saturday someone will nearly drown while swimming off the unsupervised rocky revetment just north of the beach.

After tagging the Evanston border in Rogers Park, the northeast corner of the city, I pedal west down Howard into West Ridge, stopping to pick up a fried clam lunch at the old-school Fish Keg storefront. Rolling south on Kedzie, I'm passing by the center of Chicago's Orthodox Jewish community. A preteen girl and boy walk down the street, the latter in suit, fedora, and sidelocks.

Continuing west on busy Devon, I pass Novelty Golf & Games on the Lincolnwood side. The course includes a giant rooster, a miniature Hancock Tower, and an ersatz Easter Island moai.

Just west of the Edens, I follow the borderline on Ionia into pleasantly sedate Edgebrook. As I round a northerly knob of the city, the suburb-in-the-city feel is hammered home by the sight of an older gentleman watering the yard of his ranch house while sitting in the driveway on a striped lawn chair that mirrors the home's American flag.

Rolling west on Touhy, I pass the Leaning Tower of Niles, a half-size replica of the Pisa landmark. Across the street is the Edgebrook Motel, with an appealingly garish red and seafoam-green sign, the first of several examples of retro-futurist "Googie" architecture I'll encounter on this trek.

A mile on the North Branch Trail takes me to one of Chicagoland's best-known examples of Googie, Superdawg Drive-In. Its midcentury design features blue and white diamond panels, red neon, and winking anthropomorphic wieners on the roof.

Soon I'm tracing the outline of Edison Park, Chicago's northwestern-most neighborhood. Eighty-seven percent white, it's popular with Chicago city workers, many of whom might prefer to live in the suburbs, but need to meet the city's residency requirement. Ebinger Elementary displays a "We Support Our First Responders" banner with images of a firefighter and a cop.

After rolling southwest, I enjoy several miles of serene riding on the wooded Des Plaines River Trail. Exiting the path at Belmont, I resist the temptation to detour to River Grove to visit Gene & Jude's, famous for its minimalist "depression dogs" (onion, relish, mustard, and sport peppers only), and Hala Kahiki, the historic multiroom tiki complex next door.

Heading east I'm in Dunning, where I pass Truc Lam Temple, a Vietnamese house of worship that recently relocated from Uptown. A plump, grinning Buddha statue reclines in front.

Pedaling into Austin, I pass Ben's Bar-Be-Cue, in a beautiful old terra-cotta storefront. Continuing south on Mason and Mayfield as the sun descends, I spot many "Black Lives Matter" signs and tricolor Black Liberation flags on display. Kids are playing on the sidewalk with toy cars and scooters, or jumping on a trampoline next to a community garden. People sell sno-balls with vividly colored syrups from card tables. Five swan-shaped planters stand cheerfully on a brick stoop. As I cross Madison, I look left toward Loop skyscrapers tinted pink by the sunset, about seven miles east, but seemingly a world away.

After crossing Columbus Park and rolling southeast through an industrial zone, I'm at 26th in Little Village, Chicago's second-busiest retail strip, where it's definitely time for dinner. At Taqueria Los Gallos, I pick up a tub of their specialty, *carne en su jugo*: beef, bacon, and beans in broth, garnished with radishes, avocado, and lime. I feast at nearby Manuel Perez Jr. Plaza. Across the street, a raucous band featuring tumbling timbale rhythms and a prominent tuba blares from a backyard party. Someone sets off fireworks and the ground shakes.

Refueled, I continue south on the Pulaski Bridge over the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal into Brighton Park, then take residential streets west through Garfield Ridge, part of the southwest side bungalow belt. There are many backyard gatherings here, including a full-blown house music dance party in someone's garage.

I'm sleeping at the iconic Rainbow Motel, known for its waterbed-and-Jacuzzi rooms, including ones with Las Vegas, Hawaiian, outer space, and, oddly, sandwich themes. While I feel a little silly staying at a love hotel solo, I spent a night there with a girlfriend years ago, so I know it's a reasonably sanitary, non-scary place. It's also the cheapest option in the area, save for the nearby Skylark Motel which, ominously, doesn't offer overnight stays until after midnight. Granted, my bare-bones single room is nothing to write home about, and when I ask the desk clerk if it comes with a complimentary bottle of spumante like last time, he just laughs at me.

In the morning, after grabbing a Danish and doughnut across the street at busy Weber's Bakery, I pedal east on 64th in the Clearing neighborhood. I'm once again in cop-and-fireman land, as evidenced by the many variations on Blue Lives Matter flags flying, including one that includes a red stripe for firefighters and a green one for border patrol agents.

Rolling southeast into Ashburn, I check out Vito & Nick's, a contender for the best thin crust in Chicago, then head to Lawndale and Columbus to visit the shrine and mural honoring Issac Martinez, 13. An allegedly intoxicated hit-and-run driver killed Martinez on his bike last June. A white-painted "ghost bike" was also installed at the crash site with a sign reading "Safe Bike Lanes!"

Pedaling east into Beverly, I grab a snack of chili cheese fries at Janson's Drive-In, which has another awesome Googie sign, serenaded by Buddy Holly and Chubby Checker. From there, annoyingly, the city boundaries veer west again, taking me farther from my finish line.

Crossing Sacramento, I'm in Mount Greenwood, at the southwest corner of the city. It's another overwhelmingly white city worker neighborhood, with a history of racial tension. After rounding Saint Xavier University, I pass a house with a "Don't Tread on Me" flag, a reminder that I'm in the only part of Chicago that went for Trump in 2016.

I ride three sides of Saint Casimir Catholic Cemetery on hectic multilane roads, passing yet another cool Googie sign, at Fox Home Center in Alsip. Returning east to Morgan Park, I notice St. Walter Catholic Church has an outdoor display of small sculptures of Jesus walking the Stations of the Cross. Sadly, someone has pried one of the metal crucifixes from his hands.

I consider veering a mile north to Home of the Hoagy to sample a sweet steak, the legendary south-side-only cheesesteak variant, but decide I need to stay focused on my task.

Continuing southeast into West Pullman, the 12700 block of South Morgan has a block club sign prohibiting activities ranging from ball playing to drug dealing. This corner of the neighborhood seems neat and orderly. Tidy homes on 129th back up to the Calumet River.

On the other side of the river in the tiny Riverdale enclave, the only Chicago neighborhood south of the Calumet, it's a different story. Many houses are falling apart, seemingly awaiting demolition. Local community advocate Fatimah Al-Nurridin will later tell me she's not sure why this is the case, but there's interest in improving the area.

After I head northeast into the Altgeld Gardens housing project, two young boys on a gas-powered dirt bike try to talk me into racing them for a $5 bet so they can buy Cokes. "Sorry guys, I've got to keep moving," I mumble through my mask. If I was quicker on my feet, I'd ask if they know Deloris Lucas, known as "The Bike Lady" because she runs the cycling and wellness group We Keep You Rollin' out of the Golden Gate neighborhood, next door to Altgeld.

Next I make the harrowing but basically unavoidable trip east on high-speed 130th to get to Hegewisch, at the southeast corner of the city. The neighborhood feels like a sleepy small town in Indiana, which lies just east. I grab a plump chicken-filled masa pocket at Gorditas Adrian's, then roll east to tag the Hoosier border, passing Harbor Point Estates, Chicago's only trailer park.

Finally it's time to return north. After rolling by Club 81 Too, a longtime corner bar known for its Friday fish fries, I skirt Wolf Lake, which straddles the Illinois-Indiana border and was home to an active Nike missile silo during the Cold War. Then I pick up the Burnham Greenway and ride through lakeside Calumet Park, full of people grilling.

Pedaling west on 95th, I stop at Calumet Fisheries for a gorgeous hunk of garlic-pepper smoked salmon. The seafood shack stands next to the river bridge Jake and Elwood famously jumped in the Bluesmobile.

Soon I'm at the Lakefront Trail again. I've got 16 miles of what should be smooth sailing on familiar turf with a sweet tailwind to complete my circuit.

But suddenly the sky darkens, and the wind does a 180. By the time I reach Promontory Point, I'm fighting a headwind and downpour, rolling into the jaws of a thunderstorm. Weirdly, the setting sun remains visible to my left, and then a rainbow materializes over Lake Michigan.

Luckily, the storm soon dissipates, and my spin back to Montrose is uneventful. But I can't imagine a more fitting grand finale to my epic circuit around Chicago than that bizarro sunset-thunder-rainbow.

@greenfieldjohn

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Chef Jennifer Kim and a colorful collection of edible "time capsules" COURTESY JENNIFER KIM

FOOD FEATURE

Jennifer Kim is bottling love

As Passerotto closes, its chef reimagines the future by preserving the past.

By Mike Sula

Jennifer Kim's mom keeps a bottle under her kitchen sink containing knobby, gnarly roots and a continually replenished volume of clear, high-proof spirit.

"She has this ongoing ginseng vodka," says Kim, the chef behind Andersonville's Korean-Italian Passerotto, which just closed its doors for good on Saturday. "It's probably moonshine. But she'll put a little spoonful in tea or something else. Fucking Koreans and ginseng: that's our go-to for everything. Ginseng fixes all. It's a curative, and restorative, and an anti-inflammatory, and there're so many different infusions."

Kim has a jar of it herself, steeping on a shelf in a newly dedicated storage room, next to the turmeric honey, ume plum gin, and some dozens of other ongoing preservation-fermentation projects she's undertaken during the pandemic. Passerotto might be closing, but this room represents a new beginning, arising out of something very old.

I talked to Kim a few days before Passerotto's last carryout-delivery services. It's closing in part because she needs time to reconcile the joy of cooking with the necessity of making a living in a broken industry. "How do you share the bounties that you have made, and also still be able to pay rent?" And she was getting ready to say goodbye to the community that formed around her restaurant just over two years after it opened in what seemed, at the time, like a cursed location. Despite it all she sounded upbeat.

"I'm extremely upset," she says. "We're taking time to mourn and grieve but we're also taking time to celebrate because there's been this great untethering." Kim is a one-time pharmacy student who switched tracks and came up in the kitchens of a handful of One Off Hospitality restaurants— Nico Osteria, Avec, Blackbird—before making her name at the short-lived cured seafood-focused microdeli Snaggletooth.

Later, amid rising acclaim, Kim became one of the city's most outspoken chefs on restaurant reform, particularly with regard to the way the industry treats its most marginalized and vulnerable workers. But even under restricted business operations, that work and the work of running a restaurant during the pandemic became ever more exhausting. "Anything that you do for the restaurant or with the restaurant or in the restaurant always sort of has this dark cloud of 'and then don't forget you also have to make money.' It kind of takes that little bit of joy and magic out of what you're doing."

Like many restaurant workers, Kim and her crew found ways to keep the lights on, even though they decided collectively not to reopen the restaurant's patio or dining room. Instead, early on, along with heat-and-serve meal kits and takeaway family dinners, they began offering DIY quarantine kits for making your own kimchi or XO sauce.

Preservation, fermentation, and conserving are the sort of time-consuming, low-and-slow kitchen projects Kim relished as a professional chef—the kind of work the whole staff put their hands in and bonded over but still found precious little time for.

The anxieties of running a business only became more aggravated with the pandemic, but at least there was more time. "I thought, why don't I spend that digging deeper into Korean history?" she says.

"I was really focusing on, 'what is fermentation to Korean culture?' A lot of that was done in large family gatherings or even a couple people that lived around each other who were like, 'We're going to come together and make big batches and split it between everyone in the neighborhood.' I just really love that about Korean cuisine, but in the midst of a pandemic, small gatherings are not encouraged. That part of my life is missing right now, but I could still pay homage."

In July the restaurant introduced its Preservation Pantry, rolling out a dazzling selection of seasonal farmers market and foraged preserves: summer squash *sott'olio*, sweet corn and pepper confit, juneberry capers, perilla leaf bitters, blueberry *chojang*, and peach *ssamjang*. Along with older projects like vinegars and vermouths aging since the previous season, these items sold out quickly, and as it became apparent the restaurant would be closing, they weren't replenished.

But informed by texts such as Harold →

Preserving the past, one bottle at a time COURTESY JENNIFER KIM

McGee's *On Food and Cooking*, and the more recent *Noma Guide to Fermentation*, as well as a staff field trip to South Korea in January, Kim didn't stop experimenting. In May she macerated a bunch of unripe green plums in sugar, and babied them for 104 days until she had *maesil cheong*, the medicinal plum syrup Koreans use to sweeten teas or spike sodas. "It's those two items, and it's time and care," she says. "I never actually made it from step one. You can always just buy it. But those two things eventually turn into three different things." Two weeks ago she strained the syrup, and soaked the plums in soju, which she reckons will be fragrant, lightly sweet, and ready to bottle by Thanksgiving. From there she'll pit the plums, chop them, and mix them with gochujang and sesame oil for *maesil-jjangahji*, ready by the New Year—she says it's a great sub for ssamjang in family-style grilling, especially for seafood.

Kim also macerated some of those plums in Letherbee Gin, and has Polish-style sauerkraut and pickles going, as well as some brined Russian rye apples. "They're time capsules," she says. "Every time you open a jar of something or eat something, it imparts a memory from somewhere before, or it imparts a new memory. It's like, what are we trying to remember from this time? And what do we want not to forget.

"I'm rediscovering for myself a physical act of cooking that gives me an excuse to go see friends and drop something off on their porch and be like 'I thought of you today.' It's love bottled."

At the same time she's also starting to think in terms of scale, with cases of tomatoes, peppers, and summer squash to process, jar, and hand label. She has her signature Mama Kim's red cabbage in the works, and once napa cabbage fully comes into season she'll get to work on classic *baechu* kimchi. Once the dust settles after the restaurant closes, she'll address how she'll introduce these things to the "alternative economy" so many restaurant workers have pivoted to. These things will likely be offered via Instagram (@jennifer.skim), but she hints that a number of Korean *banchan* are being reserved for a pop-up in the next few weeks, modeled after *pojangmacha*, South Korea's ubiquitous outdoor street food tents. She still needs to pay her rent, after all.

Meanwhile, "Sometimes you gotta sit and let shit get good," she says. "Let it do what it needs to do to turn into something else. Go be a human being that doesn't have a title or a restaurant, and just do the things that make you happy as a human."

@MikeSula

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MEGAN KIRBY

NOVELTY DINING

Gone but not frog-otten

A zinester remembers Rainforest Cafe.

By Megan Kirby

I watch a TikTok where the Rainforest Cafe frog sits on a trailer in a parking lot, dismantled. When I fall asleep, I dream I have adopted the frog. I am trying to convince my roommate we have the space. "You can use it as a plant stand," I tell her. "Besides, think of the content!"

Cha Cha the frog stood sentry over Chicago for 22 years, peering out over Ohio and Clark streets with wide red eyes and a benign smile. Did you know their name was Cha Cha? I didn't until I went to Rainforest Cafe for the first time, in August 2019. My buddy Jon and I like to go to theme restaurants and write zines about the experience. That late summer evening, our pick was Rainforest Cafe. We ate subpar dinners and took pictures of the animatronic gorillas and spent the next year researching, drawing tree frogs and "Jungle Burgers," drinking seltzers and slamming capitalist schemes at Jon's kitchen table. Even before Cha Cha showed up in my dreams, the Rainforest Cafe sunk deep into my psyche.

But all things must end—especially kitschy theme restaurants clinging to life with the suction of an amphibian's desperate grasp. In August 2020, they dethroned Cha Cha and tore down the plaster mushrooms flanking the River North establishment.

Rainforest Cafe's demise was not entirely unexpected. In December 2019, the Woodfield Mall location was replaced with a Peppa Pig World of Play. When Jon and I went for our fateful meal, the vines covering the walls were dusty. The mist from the wishing well waterfall filled the restaurant with the smell of musty chlorine. Even the animatronic jungle creatures were over it. The leopard's tail swung slowly; Tracy Tree's human eyes twitched with exhaustion.

Our waiter led us through the empty first floor and up the stairs, where a small cluster of diners were seated near each other in front of the robotic elephants. Families with elementary-aged kids, a group of tourists at a long table, and Jon and myself armed with notebooks and adventurers' keen eyes. We were intrepid explorers, deep in the jungle, ordering Diet Cokes with a slice of lime, if you have it?

As a kid, my parents refused to take us to Rainforest Cafe. They would not even entertain the idea. Eleven-year-old me was not happy. Oh, the forbidden clout of a Rainforest Cafe bucket hat. I distinctly remember standing outside the Woodfield location, watching a man with a live parrot. Jon told me that cannot be true—how could they have a live bird in an establishment that passes the health code? I assumed I created a false memory, but when I looked it up, I learned that I was right. In the early aughts, some Rainforest Cafe locations had live parrots entertain kids on field trips as they devoured chicken strips.

In Rainforest Cafe's prime, mechanical birds swung and wheeled from the ceiling. Mist machines hid around the room, transforming the climate to a humid jungle. (The vibe everyone wants as they eat their $14 Anaconda Pasta.) What happened to these feats of experiential dining? "OSHA violations," our waiter shrugged.

That night in 2019, we knew we were dining in a relic. Everything was a little faded, a little musty, a little mildewed from the constant churn of the artificial waterfall. None of this bothered me. The truth is, I was drawn in by the absurdity of it all. The wild thing isn't that Rainforest Cafe shuttered; it's that it survived for two decades.

We're witnessing the downfall of maximalist experiential dining. The Rock 'n' Roll McDonald's fell in 2018, just across the street from Cha Cha's stalwart gaze. Corny-combative diner Ed Debevic's got pushed out of River North in 2015. Quick—someone check on Medieval Times!

Restaurants aren't built like theme parks anymore. A gift shop does not add a Michelin star. But I do understand the appeal of these spaces, even as they disappear from the public. The point wasn't to feel like you were actually in the middle of a tropical jungle. The point was to play along.

Every 45 minutes at the Rainforest Cafe, a simulated thunderstorm rippled through the space. Ceiling lights flashed, speakers boomed, the animatronic elephants trumpeted in fear. Every time, Jon reacted in faux-terror, gripping the table and hollering. And every time, I laughed like a toddler—gleefully, and without shame. That joke really landed. And I think that sums up the sweet and eerie appeal of Rainforest Cafe: to sit amongst decayed and flimsy fantasy and pretend together.

There's another TikTok making the rounds. A crane wrenches Cha Cha from their perch while a bro across the street chants, "Don't take the frog!"

The funny thing is, when Rainforest Cafe opened downtown in 1997, the city was horrified. Founder Steve Schussler told the *Chicago Tribune*, "Nowhere, and I mean nowhere, has the reception been as mean."

Maybe that's what nostalgia culture boils down to: protecting the things we once reviled. And to what end? Rainforest Cafe is owned by Landry's Inc., a conglomerate owned by a major Trump supporter. I spent hours crawling through rainforestcafe.com to see if the wishing well coins actually support the rainforest. Results inconclusive.

In a stroke of creative genius, Jon and I titled our publication based on the experience *Zineforest Café*. On the cover, we drew the Rainforest Cafe logo, except he's the gorilla and I'm Cha Cha. Before we release it, we decided we needed an epilogue. A proper eulogy, now that we know how things end.

Right now, I like to imagine a future where I'm walking downtown with someone I haven't met yet. We'll pass the Ohio-Clark corner, and I'll point to whatever has replaced Rainforest Cafe, and I'll say—with true warmth in my voice—"I used to know the frog who lived there."

@megankirb

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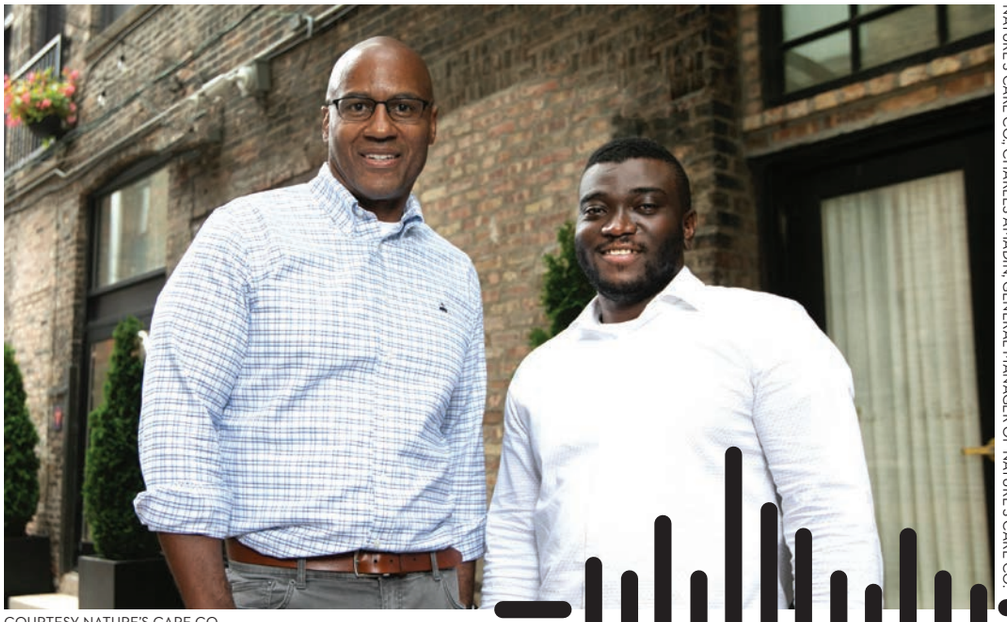

GARY LITTLE, CEO OF COLAGROUP, LLC, AND DISPENSARY MANAGER OF NATURE'S CARE CO., CHARLES AMADIN, GENERAL MANAGER OF NATURE'S CARE CO.

COURTESY NATURE'S CARE CO.

When Chicago speaks, Nature's Care listens

Meet the cannabis dispensary already proving to be a community leader

"It began in December 2019, during a casual dinner conversation between Nature's Care and ColaGroup," said Charles Amadin, General Manager of Nature's Care Company. "And that conversation budded into two historic cannabis equity and social justice partnerships—two partnerships that are paving the way for cannabis dispensaries, not only shining light on the sincere struggles and historic wrongs of cannabis laws, but also providing the necessary resources to eradicate those wrongs and establish pathways to success for disproportionately impacted individuals harmed by the War on Drugs."

Nature's Care may be a medical and adult-use cannabis dispensary brand in Illinois, but its mission includes much more than selling cannabis. Nature's Care believes in doing the right thing and using its resources to support under-served communities and citizens in Illinois. With its upcoming new cannabis dispensary slated to open in the West Loop on September 28, Nature's Care is taking this time to show Chicago the reality of their mission and just what they've been up to for the past year.

In March 2020, Nature's Care signed a first-of-its-kind in the nation Community Benefits Agreement with Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition (CEIC), designed to ensure that the economic success of Nature's Care West Loop dispensary is linked with economic benefits for the communities most disproportionately harmed by the War on Drugs. Nature's Care agreed to the following:

- Hire 75% of employees from disproportionately impacted areas (DIAs) within two years
- Provide 100% living wages for those individuals
- Donate 10% of dispensary net profits to community organizations that help DIAs
- Contract at least 10% of products and services from minority and social equity businesses
- Create a training and career development program for employees
- Host "know-your-rights" events and participate in National Expungement Week and ongoing expungement support.

And Nature's Care is holding true to this agreement, having already hired 95% of the promised employees from DIAs in half of the promised time—all 33 jobs, with more to come, provide 100% living wages.

Nature's Care also signed an agreement with ColaGroup, a social equity partner in Illinois, seeking to combat social injustice by creating real solutions and pathways to help those disproportionately impacted. The solutions include education in expungement, "Know Your Rights" virtual community events, financial literacy, cannabis careers, and guidance and sponsorship in business ventures. In addition, Nature's Care sponsored 34 applications for cannabis licenses to the State of Illinois for individuals from DIAs.

Nature's Care and ColaGroup are particularly proud of and committed to their work on expungement, which involves clearing or sealing the record of a person's prior arrest, criminal charges, or convictions. Together, they created an online dashboard (naturescarecompany.com/social-equity) that provides step-by-step educational information, access to legal services, and the necessary knowledge required to navigate the cannabis expungement process. Nature's Care is also supporting National Expungement Week (Sept. 19-26), during which they covered the rap sheet costs of almost 40 participants.

"It's not lip service. We act on our promises. Over the last year, we created an online dashboard to help navigate expungement, built a dispensary team from DIAs, and worked with minority and social equity businesses to make Nature's Care West Loop a reality—among many others," stated Amadin.

To celebrate the milestone achievements coming out of both the CEIC and ColaGroup agreements, Nature's Care is running an equity campaign entitled "The City is Speaking. And We Hear You." The campaign genesis speaks to the city's outcry for change and support, and it will spotlight the agreements, the partners who pushed them into reality, and Nature's Care's mission and accomplishments.

"It's time for Chicago to see and experience what we've created," said Amadin. "We love and care about what we do, and our Nature's Care West Loop dispensary is proof that we honor our promises. Supporting Nature's Care means supporting your community. 'The City is Speaking. And We Hear You.'"

Nature's Care West Loop is located at 810 West Randolph Street and is slated to open Monday, September 28, 2020. For more information on the location, agreements, and how to access the tools and services listed, visit NaturesCareCompany.com or follow the brand on Instagram (@naturescare) and Facebook (@naturescarecompany).

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POLITICS

Under Barr's thumb

Trump could teach Madigan and Burke a thing or two about corruption.

By Ben Joravsky

As time goes on, it seems more obvious to me that Donald Trump would fit right in with all the regulars of the local Democratic Party.

Not that you'll hear much about this from our local Democratic-bashing Republicans. No, they're pretty silent when it comes to Trump's corruption.

We'll get to them. Back to Trump and the Dems . . .

For starters, former Governor Blagojevich—aka, Blago—has become one of Trump's biggest in-state cheerleaders since the president commuted his sentence for conviction and let him out of prison.

And Alderman Ed Burke—who's facing federal corruption charges—helped Trump save millions in property taxes by appealing the assessment on Trump Tower to the Cook County assessor's office, which was then headed by Joe Berrios—another Chicago Democrat.

And don't forget Mayor Rahm. Trump donated $50,000 to Emanuel's first mayoral campaign. Just in time to have Emanuel—once in office—conveniently look the other way when Trump slapped that big ugly sign on his tower.

Then Rahm acted like a helpless little nobody who couldn't do anything to force Trump to take it down.

So, yes, plenty of friends among Chicago Democrats. But, it goes deeper than that. Consider the parallels in behavior.

House speaker Madigan's under investigation because Commonwealth Edison doled out contracts and jobs to some of his cronies.

Madigan says he did nothing wrong. Says he doesn't dictate who ComEd hires. And points out that ComEd's rate deals passed with plenty of Republican support. So it's not like he did anything on ComEd's behalf.

I think he makes a strong case—I can't recall the last time Republicans took a strong stand against ComEd, or any big utility company for that matter.

Nonetheless, the Madigan/ComEd connection has Republicans, like state representative Jim Durkin, howling for investigations. But they're curiously quiet about Trump's role in the case of TikTok, the Chinese-owned social media platform.

Trump demanded that ByteDance, which owns TikTok, sell the company, on the grounds that it's a national security threat for a Chinese-owned firm to have so much access to user data.

That's ironic coming from Trump, who called on Russia to hack into Democratic computers.

It looked like Microsoft might purchase TikTok. But Trump let it be known that he preferred Oracle.

Why not? Larry Ellison—Oracle's cofounder—is one of the few tech titans with close ties to Trump.

In February, Ellison hosted a fundraiser for Trump at his estate in California. "For $100,000, supporters can join a golf outing and have their photo taken with the president," according to the *Desert Sun* newspaper. "For $250,000, contributors get a photo, golf outing, and can participate in a roundtable discussion."

Oracle's chief executive—Safra Catz—was on Trump's transition team.

In August, Labor secretary Eugene Scalia was accused of intervening on Oracle's behalf to settle a class action job discrimination suit, according to a whistleblower's complaint.

And in a move straight out of the ComEd playbook, Oracle hired people close to Trump, including a lobbyist named Matt Schlapp whose wife, Mercedes Schlapp, works for Trump's reelection campaign.

Quick—Jim Durkin, hold an investigation!

Lo and behold, ByteDance recently rejected Microsoft's offer. "The move leaves Oracle—one of the few Silicon Valley firms to publicly ally with Mr. Trump—as the sole publicly known remaining bidder to TikTok," as the *New York Times* puts it.

Funny how that happens.

Wait there's more . . .

When local Dems get in trouble, they dip into their campaign funds to pay their legal bills. Madigan's done it—as have Burke and former Alderman Danny Solis.

Compared to Trump, they're pikers. Since 2015, Trump's tapped into various campaign accounts to pay about $58 million in legal fees, according to Eric Lipton's investigation for the *New York Times*.

A few cases stem from Trump suing former aides (like Omarosa Manigault) for allegedly violating nondisclosure agreements.

I doubt if Attorney General William Barr or any of his lawyers at the Justice Department will be looking into this.

Quite the contrary, the Justice Department recently moved to take over the defense of Trump's rape trial.

Yes, Trump's been accused of rape—not that you'll hear any Republicans talk about it. They only care about sexual harassment if they can use it against Democrats.

E. Jean Carroll—a journalist and book author—says Trump raped her in the changing room of a department store in New York City.

Trump denied it. Said he didn't know Carroll. Said she wasn't his type. Which implies he might have raped her if she were.

Carroll filed a defamation suit against Trump. She says there's a substance on the dress she was wearing the day Trump raped her. Wants the president to take a DNA test to see if the substance was left by him.

Trump's racking up legal bills fighting not to take the DNA test. Though you'd think he'd do whatever he could to clear his name if he was innocent of her charges. Funny how these law-and-order types don't want law and order for themselves.

With the Justice Department's intervention, you, the taxpayers, would be paying for Trump's rape defense.

That's like Madigan tapping Attorney General Kwame Raoul to handle his defense in the ComEd case. Can you imagine the howling from, say, the *Tribune*, in such a case?

Speaking of the *Tribune*, John Kass recently conducted an interview with William Barr.

For the benefit of younger readers, Kass is the far-right, MAGA-loving *Tribune* columnist who routinely savages Madigan, Kim Foxx, and other Dems.

He had a chance to ask Barr about Carroll's suit, the DNA test, and taxpayers footing the bill for Trump's rape defense.

Alas, he asked Barr about his favorite steakhouse in Chicago. Apparently, Kass ran out of space before he got to the all-important question of whether Barr favors A.1. or Tabasco.

How embarrassing. To paraphrase the Stones, under Barr's thumb the "Siamese cat" has become "the sweetest pet in the world."

Purr . . .

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The Chicago Reader BOOK CLUB

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Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women That a Movement Forgot
Book Club Month: October 20
Author Talk: 10/22/2020

Sonali Dev
Recipe for Persuasion
November 20
11/19/2020

Riva Lehrer
Golem Girl
December 20
12/17/2020

Emil Ferris
My Favorite Thing Is Monsters
January 21
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Eve Ewing
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2/25/2021

Nnedi Okorafor
Remote Control
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3/25/2021

Natalie Moore
The South Side
April 21
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Rebecca Makkai
The Great Believers
May 21
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Fatimah Asghar
If They Come for Us
June 21
6/24/2021

Kayla Ancrum
Darling
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NEWS & POLITICS

CULTURE

At home with Chicago's mid-century modernism

A new book looks beyond skyscrapers to a neglected bounty of single family houses.

By DEANNA ISAACS

Chicago's skyscraper modernism—the Hancock, Marina City, Sears/Willis—is the city's treasured calling card. What's less known and much less appreciated is our area's parallel cache of modernist residential architecture. *Modern in the Middle*, a new book by historian and preservationist Susan S. Benjamin and IIT professor Michelangelo Sabatino, sets out to fix that.

Published this month by the Monacelli Press, it offers a portfolio of 53 modern houses built in the city and suburbs between 1929 and 1975, along with the story behind each house, more than 300 stunning period photos (many of them from the Chicago History Museum's Hedrich-Blessing archive), and essays by the authors that provide broader context.

Modern in the Middle originated with Benjamin, the co-author of two previous books on Chicago architecture and the researcher-writer responsible for numerous national and local landmark nominations. She says she's been thinking about writing it since she worked on an exhibition on the same subject in 1976. Co-author Sabatino is an architect, preservationist, and historian.

The word "middle" in the book's title, with its potentially sleepy connotations, was a deliberate choice according to the authors, locating this architecture smack in the middle of the century, middle of the country, and

Harriet Davis and Louis Ancel House in Glencoe, 1961 DARRIS LEE HARRIS

middle class.

At a time when great urban centers were considered the hubs for everything serious and sophisticated, "What we tried to show is that these clients were perfectly fine with living in the suburbs," Sabatino said in a phone interview last week. "And that, even for those who could afford more, there was a sense of being frugal, but elegant."

"We're not talking lifestyles of the rich and famous here," he said. "This is cosmopolitan informality."

The title also points to a middle ground between the opposing philosophies of the two towering figures of Chicago modernism, Frank Lloyd Wright's organic approach to design and Mies van der Rohe's more abstract focus on structure. The authors say that despite their differences, the two shared an appreciation of nature: while Wright used natural materials and designed buildings that melded into the landscape, it's Mies's massive expanses of glass that bring the outside in.

"If you lie down on the bed in the Farnsworth House," Sabatino told me, "the architecture disappears, and you're basically in nature."

Many of these houses will be a revelation. While a few, like Farnsworth and the Mies house that's now a part of the Elmhurst Art Museum, are open to the public, and a number of others are familiar—the glass box garage from the John Hughes film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*; Adlai Stevenson's country house—most are functioning private homes scattered anonymously through suburbs from Flossmoor to Waukegan, and even further afield.

A smaller number are in the city, where vacant land was sparse, but they include the only house in the book by a Black architect—the compact Miesian home John W. Moutoussamy (who studied with Mies at IIT) designed for his own family in the Chatham neighborhood, before he went on to bigger projects, including the Johnson Publications Company headquarters.

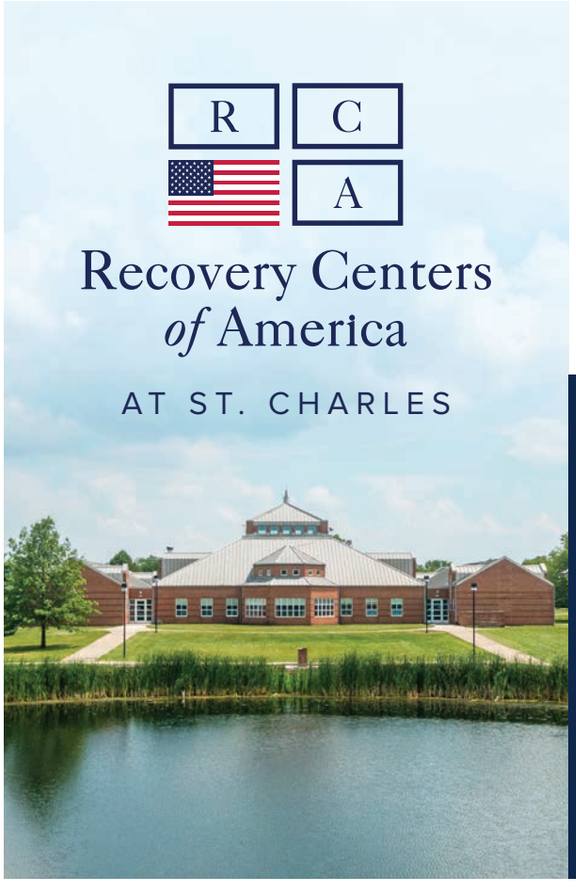
There is also only one house by a woman architect in the book—Jean Wiersema Wehrheim—another reflection of the fact that the profession was, for so long, notoriously short of opportunity for anyone but white men, Benjamin told me. On a more positive note, while the houses those white male architects built have traditionally been identified by the names of their male owners, every home in this book that was commissioned by a couple is labeled with the names of both partners.

Modern in the Middle ends in 1975, when high modernism began to wane and people were moving from the suburbs back into the city. Now, both authors think that trend may be reversing. "Even when this pandemic disappears, people have learned that they can actually work from home," Sabatino says. "I'm imagining that there's going to be increased interest in having access to nature and in this kind of elegant but informal space."

That could help preserve Chicago's stock of these midcentury modern residences. It's the authors' hope that this book will, too. The front cover bears an interior photo of the long, low, flat-roofed, open-plan Highland Park home designed by Keck & Keck for Maxine Weil and Sigmund Kunstadter and built in 1952. It was demolished and replaced with a larger house in 2003—a fate too many midcentury modern homes met when the land they stood on became more valuable to the marketplace than the house itself. "We really hope this book serves as a catalyst," Sabatino says. "We hope the positive examples of preservation will encourage folks that might want to take a project like this on."

The book closes with a glimpse at the authors' own homes—suburban houses in the modernist mode, built in 1939 and 1941. It's an impressive scholarly work, but also, clearly, a labor of love.

@Deannalsaacs



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On a July afternoon, ex-cops working for a Rogers Park landlord extracted a tenant from his home at gunpoint. See the online version of this story for video of the incident. MAYA DUKMASOVA

HOUSING

That lockout you witnessed? It didn't happen.

Ex-cops attempted to throw out a Rogers Park tenant at gunpoint. The police report tells a different story.

By Maya Dukmasova

Two middle-aged men sat in a red Hyundai Sonata with the license plate "RUF," idling in a back alley parking lot along Farwell Avenue in Rogers Park. When I pulled in and parked, the white man behind the wheel nodded at me. I went to my friends' first-floor apartment to pick up some belongings and when I came out a few minutes later the men were standing, maskless, in the gangway in front of the back staircase of one of the neighboring buildings that shares the alley. A third man who was wearing a mask and holding some papers stood a few feet behind them.

A tenant from one of the third-floor units ascended the stairs. He was moving fast, characteristically dressed in a tight lycra biking top and cargo shorts, with tinfoil sticking out from underneath his helmet. The neighbors often saw him coming in and out of the apartment with a bike and heard him screaming at odd hours. It was hard to tell what was happening in the home because his windows were filled with blankets and other debris. Just as he made it to the door of the apartment, which was ajar, the two men from the Hyundai followed up the stairs. The one who had been behind the wheel—a heavyset, gray haired man in his 60s wearing a blue polo shirt—had drawn a gun. The other, who had a pair of narrow sunglasses perched on his forehead, had his hand at the waist of his bootcut jeans.

"Where's he at?" the driver called out to someone inside the apartment.

"In here," a man's voice responded.

"Come on out!" the driver barked. "Come on out! Police! Out, now!" He swung the gun from the door and in the direction of the stairs as the tenant emerged with his hands up. "Put your hands behind your back," the driver ordered as he marched the man down the stairs, gesturing with his gun. "Get out."

"Get out," the other man chimed in.

"You're trespassing," the driver said as they made it down another landing. "You don't belong in there, get the fuck out of here."

When they reached the last flight of stairs, the tenant protested. "The fuck I don't dude, I live there! I've lived there for fucking over a year!"

"Let's go!" the men responded in unison. It was then that the driver, still with his gun out, turned and saw me filming with my cell phone.

"Don't threaten me again," the driver then said to the tenant as he descended the last flight of stairs.

"Threaten you with what?"

"Don't threaten me again."

"I didn't threaten you!"

"Get out," the driver said again as they reached the ground floor. The tenant said he would call the police.

"Get out, I'm telling you," the driver repeated. "Are you on the lease? Are you on the lease yes or no? The answer is no. We know that and management's here," he indicated the third, masked man who was watching from a few steps away.

"Is this Greenspire Realty?" the tenant asked the third man. He received no response.

"They don't want you here," the driver said.

Soon the tenant appeared to walk away. The guy with the shades on his forehead turned to me and said, "And you're recording what? Really? Really?" waving his hand dismissively. Moments later the tenant reemerged in the back stairwell having apparently accessed it through the basement. This time the two men intercepted him on the stairs. A scuffle ensued in the shadows of the back landing. "Please stop, you're hurting me!" the tenant repeated several times. Someone got shoved down the stairs with a thud, and called someone else a "motherfucker." "Please stop, you're hurting me!" the tenant yelled again.

"Why don't you fuckin' stop?" one of the two men responded. "We've been nice with you. Why don't you fuckin' stop?"

"Help!" the tenant shouted again and again. "I can't breathe! Help! Look he's got my fucking helmet around my neck!"

Right about then nearly a dozen cops from the Chicago Police Department's 24th District arrived in the gangway.

For the next hour on that July 30 afternoon, my friends and I and other neighbors from the cluster of brick apartment buildings around that alley watched and filmed as the cops spoke with the tenant and his former roommate (who was the actual leaseholder but had moved out months before because the unit had become uninhabitable), representatives from Greenspire (the company that owns that unit in the condo building), and the men who claimed they were police.

"This fucking guy he pulled a gun on me right away, he represented himself as the police," the tenant told Lucas Cunningham, a young, gloved but unmasked officer in a CPD baseball cap who was the first to walk up to the scene.

"I never said I was the police," the driver of the Hyundai said to Cunningham. A chorus of neighbors' voices rang out saying that he had, indeed, claimed he was police and that the tenant was telling the truth.

We listened to a lengthy conversation between officer Joshua Surgal (whose face stayed obscured behind a baseball cap, sunglasses, and a neck warmer until most of the neighbors and their phone cameras dispersed) and Greenspire representatives, who had beamed into the alley via video call on the Hyundai driver's cell phone. He held the phone with the grid of faces at chest level as Surgal dressed them down with a high-pitched voice and thick Chicago accent.

Greenspire's people said the tenant was squatting in the unit. Surgal asked if the company had filed for eviction. A woman on the video call confirmed that Greenspire had, but that they hadn't gotten an eviction order from a judge. "OK so he's not evicted," Surgal said. "You had a tenant who allowed him to come and live in your property. . . . You know the law. A squatter can even establish residence."

I learned that shortly before I came outside, another neighbor had watched Greenspire representatives change the locks on the unit. "The first thing that happened was they went upstairs, pounded on the door and said 'Police! Open up!'" Lisa Martin, who had a clear line of sight from her third-story porch across the alley, told officer Cunningham, who chewed gum as he jotted down her story into a notebook. "Then what they did was they had two maintenance guys break in, remove the locks, change the locks, and pull his curtain down."

"As a manager you know tenants' rights, you know squatters' rights, right? And he's being allowed in by a tenant you have a lease with," officer Surgal told Greenspire on the video call. The woman on the call protested, but he interrupted. "We're in Rogers Park, we've got a lot of people with a lot of weird behavior. You guys changed the locks, you're going to have to give him the key to the locks. And you're going to have to get an eviction order. We're not taking him out."

The officer went on to chastise Greenspire's representatives for taking the situation into their own hands. "Now you guys locked him out, now you guys are in the wrong. . . . Where you guys are at is anyone who tries to remove him and keep him from that residence is gonna be in trouble. So whoever these gentlemen are . . ." he trailed off, indicating the men who attempted to evict the tenant.

"They were there to protect our employee," the woman on the video call said.

"If you guys have a legitimate belief that he's a threat, then you have to go to a judge and you have to get an emergency order and you have to have the sheriffs come and evict," Surgal said. "Right now you have a gentleman who's basically been living there, by the admission of the person that was on your lease . . . So we are already clearly establishing that he has residence. And so until you guys get the order to remove him he has the right to be in there. For sure you guys can't just come and change the locks on him, because then you guys get in trouble."

A man on the video call said something about the tenant being "a danger to the neighborhood."

"No that's not true," Surgal cut him off. "You can't establish that there's a danger right now. I got people around here that are establishing that the gentlemen that came with your manager are more of the danger. So if you want to talk about a danger to the neighborhood, I don't know if you really want to go down there. So you guys may want to reassess and think about this really carefully."

After the video call, Surgal moved far away from the crowd of onlookers and had a quiet conversation with the two men from the Hyundai. The tenant-squatter was allowed to stay in the unit. Two neighbors and I gave statements to officer Cunningham about what we saw, and shared our IDs and contact information. No arrests were made even though we and the tenant told police that Greenspire's armed representatives had pointed a gun and claimed they were cops. Slowly, the onlookers, some of whom had come outside barefoot, dispersed into their homes. The leaseholder walked away in a huff. The tenant shut himself in the apartment. Greenspire's people and the police got in their cars and drove away.

I couldn't stop thinking about what happened. The issues I've been writing about for years—eviction and policing—had converged right in front of my eyes on a random Thursday afternoon. It was the kind of incident I'd usually receive a tip about, and try to report in the face of vehement denials of malfeasance from the landlord and a total lack of corroborating evidence from the police. I must confess that, despite all I've seen as a reporter, I was unprepared for how nonchalantly the truth would be erased in real time and how quickly the systems of privilege that enable powerful people to do the wrong thing were mobilized to shield them from consequences. Reporting this story underscored my own privilege, too. None of the neighbors I spoke with were able to get much clarity about the situation on their own, while the tools at my disposal as a journalist led to most of our questions being answered.

One of my friends had written to 49th Ward alderwoman Maria Hadden (who happens to live in a building that also shares the alley) about what happened, but got only a canned response from her staffer: "We hate to hear the experience you have recently gone through. We are happy to hear the police arrived on the scene. You and your neighbors deserve to feel safe. This falls of course directly under police jurisdiction. I would recommend following up with the police on this matter to get an update."

More than anything, we wanted to know who the men from the Hyundai were and how they would be held accountable for their actions. It was hard to believe that any corporate landlord could attempt what the tenant called a "self-serve eviction" and get away with it. Indeed the Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance establishes criminal penalties against landlords for lockouts, including fines ranging from $200 to $500.

I called the 24th District to find out what was in the police report. More than a week after it happened, neither I nor any of the neighbors who gave statements and recorded videos had heard back from the cops. After several unhelpful conversations with officers on phone duty who wouldn't even share the incident report number with me, I contacted CPD's news affairs staff.

"This is a whole lot of nothing," a department spokesman said. He then gave me the report number and summarized what was in it: "So pretty much officers responded to a disturbance. They heard someone calling for help. The male was upset because a landlord was trying to do work in the apartment. The landlord said the person who was screaming had made threats. There was some concern about the landlord's wellbeing so he brought private security with him to do maintenance on this person's apartment. He started screaming for help. The incident is classified as noncriminal so there's not a detective looking into it. It just seemed like whoever the individual was didn't want the landlord to do work on the apartment."

According to the spokesman, the report (for which I promptly filed a Freedom of Information Act request) made no mention of what appeared to bystanders to be an illegal eviction attempt, of one of the security guards pointing a gun or claiming to be police, of my name or the name of at least one other witness who gave statements, of available video evidence. I asked whether there was any information about the identity of the security guards or the firm they work for. "They're just security guys," he said. "Greenspire City North, that's what the employer is listed as."

I called Greenspire and spoke with president and CEO John Dragic. "Let's not blow things out of proportion. They did not come with guns blazing," Dragic told me in a calm and soothing voice. "This is the reality: We needed to make repairs in that unit. Plumbing repairs needed to be done because the tenant was dismantling the plumbing in the unit. You're familiar with the tenant, so you know he has some issues." He went on to say that the tenant had a criminal record, was "violent and threatening," and that "there was no forced eviction."

I asked Dragic to explain what a half dozen people saw. I asked why Greenspire's people had changed the locks and claimed they were cops. "Because the tenant himself had changed the locks, we didn't have keys," Dragic said. "I wasn't there, I don't know what these [security] guys were saying, but the intent was not to evict him, the intent was to make repairs . . . We had no idea these guys had guns or anything like that."

He wouldn't reveal the identity of the men. "They are security people. They were referred to us. I'm not gonna disclose anyone's names. You won't be seeing them anymore."

I asked if Dragic had anything to say to the neighbors who were frightened, concerned that someone might have been shot or killed. "That was a one-off situation that I think was regrettable on everyone's part," he said. "We didn't understand there were firearms involved. So whatever they were saying I don't know, but our mission there was to shut off the water that was running on the people

continued from 15

below. That's why we went in."

The next day, Steve Cain, another Greenspire executive, e-mailed the *Reader*. Cain said that the problem tenant wasn't home when company representatives arrived to do repairs and that the door had been barricaded. "We were able to enter from the back door and began to do the necessary repair work," he wrote. He then offered the following narrative:

"The roommate came home, saw what was going on, entered through the front of the building, down through the basement and then came charging up [the] back steps, threatening our maintenance people. It was at this point that things really got unpleasant. Our security person charged up after him, prevented him from entering, and a fight ensued. The roommate slammed the security guard hard against a wall, injuring him. The security guard pinned him down, at which point he began screaming for the police and saying 'I can't breathe.' I believe it was at this point that Maya and many other on-lookers came out of their apartments and started filming. If you only see what happened from that point going forward, it is easy to surmise that this is just another case of a horrible, heartless landlord making life miserable for a poor, helpless tenant struggling to maintain his home."

Cain wrote that it's "hard to estimate" the value of the property damage and "on-going lost rent" the man had done to Greenspire and the original lease-holding tenant. "Ideally, I would ask that you not run this story," Cain wrote. "If anything, this story should be about the harms that come to small property owners who are left helpless to prevent the ongoing damage that is occurring to this unit, building and surrounding condo owners, not to mention the financial damage we are suffering. . . . We have gone through every legal requirement and will wait out the lifting of the ban on evictions and the reopening of the courts. But unless this guy does something to get arrested or imprisoned, we will have to constantly allow him re-access to the unit where he 'lives.'"

Marty, Greenspire's leaseholder, first moved into the condo about ten years ago. He agreed to speak to me on the condition that we not use his real name. He'd lived in that home with the previous owner, a friend who had to short-sell the condo to Greenspire after her divorce. Marty stayed on as Greenspire's tenant after she moved out and was living in the two-bedroom apartment alone when, in the spring of 2019, he met Sam, the man who'd become known to us neighbors as the problematic tenant and whose name I also changed to protect his privacy. Sam needed a place to live and Marty had a spare room, so he invited the younger man to move in and split the rent last August.

"That was the worst thing I ever, ever did," Marty told me when we met on Zoom. Sam, who earned money through bike delivery, fell short on his half of the rent almost immediately. Marty said Sam was also using methamphetamine. Within a few months their cohabitation became untenable. "He thinks the Nazis are coming to get him," Marty said. Sam accused him of spying and messing with his bike and barricaded doors in the apartment. Last December Sam had Marty arrested for throwing a television remote control at him during an altercation. When the coronavirus lockdown began in March, Marty left the apartment to stay with a friend.

Over the next several months, Marty said he continued to pay the full $1,370 rent to Greenspire while Sam changed the locks to the unit and destroyed some of Marty's things. Marty tried to remove some of his possessions from the apartment but that became harder after Sam had him served with a restraining order.

When he finally complained to the landlord, "they were more than gracious with me," Marty said. Though his lease was supposed to end in August, Marty said Greenspire agreed to terminate it a month early and give him the final month to move his belongings without having to pay any more rent. Greenspire filed an eviction case against Sam last April. "They knew they had to go through the courts," Marty said.

But eviction courts have been closed due to the pandemic and Sam still hasn't been served with a summons, according to Cook County records. And even though landlords are supposed to be able to have emergency hearings in matters like this, those can't be held until a tenant is served with the court papers.

"We filed the case and the sheriff won't even serve the papers due to COVID," Greenspire attorney Robert Kahn told me. "The sheriff is not doing their job at all. I've been going around and around with them and they've just been sitting on the papers and now they're saying in order for them to do it I have to give them an affidavit about [Sam's] criminal conduct."

Marty said that on July 30 he was surprised to receive a call from Greenspire out of the blue. "They said: 'You better get down there now. We came in there. We changed the locks.'" He said the company also wanted him to stay in the unit overnight to make sure Sam didn't return. Marty said there had been a leak in the unit a few weeks prior and the company was able to get in and investigate, but there was no new emergency maintenance to take care of that day as far as he was aware. When he arrived and saw the state of the home, he told the security guards and Greenspire's masked property manager Luis Lopez that it would be impossible for him to stay in the unit. That's when Sam came home and the guards ordered him out.

Marty added that Greenspire "wanted to kick him out and they were gonna get a company there that day to take everything out of the apartment." This also surprised him since he thought he'd have the whole next month to move out.

Marty said he'd never seen the security guards before. The gun brandishing was unnerving. "I was shocked," he said, "I didn't think that was right." Since the incident, he still hasn't been able to get his possessions, which include his parents' ashes, even though he now has the keys to the new lock. (Chicago law allows landlords to change locks if they lose access to their property, on the condition that they continue to provide tenants with keys, too.) He's been negotiating with Sam for a time to access the unit without much success.

Kahn wasn't surprised when I described what had happened, though he said he hadn't heard from his clients about the incident. "I'm hearing this more and more often every day and I can't blame too many landlords because they're not getting any recourse," he said. Recently the Chief Judge of the Cook County circuit court extended the eviction court closure and ordered the Cook County Sheriff to refrain from enforcement through September 21. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a declaration that evictions should be halted nationwide to help curb the spread of COVID-19, though the federal government hasn't issued rental assistance to tenants or landlords. "You take away people's right to [evict] and they're gonna take the law in their own hands," Kahn said. "I'm not saying it's right but I understand where it comes from. It's cheaper to throw them out and risk getting sued than waiting for the process."

The red Hyundai's vanity license plate had a faded Fraternal Order of Police sticker. I was able to track down the driver through the Illinois Secretary of State. His name is Ronald Rufo and he retired from the Chicago Police Department in 2015, where he was a cop in the 18th District. According to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Rufo was once a security guard (in addition to being a real estate agent and cosmetologist), but his license expired in 2018. Googling his name turned up several local media interviews where Rufo is often presented as a "PhD" expert on police suicide. He was also listed as an "EdD" on the covers of his books—one called *Sexual Predators Amongst Us* published in 2011, the other, a 2015 volume he edited called *Police Suicide: Is Police Culture Killing Our Officers?* His doctoral degree came from Argosy University, a now-defunct for-profit diploma mill. Rufo didn't return calls and texts for comment.

When I e-mailed Greenspire to ask whether they were aware Rufo wasn't a licensed security guard when they dispatched him for the July 30 job, Dragic didn't address the issue. Instead, he once again denied any wrongdoing. "This was not an eviction attempt no matter what you are trying to claim," Dragic wrote. "We hired security to protect our employees from a dangerous occupant of the unit while our staff was making necessary repairs . . . Any other portrayal of the events are a fabrication."

I got in touch with 49th Ward alderwoman Maria Hadden, who then did some of her own digging on the matter. She said 24th District Commander Joseph Brennan told her that the security guards were both retired CPD officers and that he knows one of them personally, but he didn't share their names. "My intention is some kind of action with this management company, to really investigate," Hadden said. "We can't have illegal evictions happening."

I reached out to Brennan through a 24th District CAPS representative, but didn't get a response.

When I caught up with neighbor Lisa Martin weeks later, she said she hadn't heard anything back from the police. Martin comes

from a police family herself; her father was a CPD commander. If the security guys were ex-cops, "they're above the rules in this city," she said. "I'm just trying to think in what universe you go to somebody's place to get them out by force of gun."

She said that while "there's no way we're gonna go back and fix the past," she wanted Greenspire to know "that what they did is not OK. And if we see anything like this again we're going to report them to the mayor, to the tenants organizations, to the alderman . . . This guy is not even a neighbor I want," she said, "but what they did to him and how they did it is absolutely wrong and it put a lot of people in danger."

Martin had placed one of the 911 calls on July 30 after observing the security guards claim they were cops. She said she hesitated, knowing that an encounter between the police and a person like Sam could end badly. "The only reason I felt comfortable to call the cops was because there were so many of us out there. So many people watching with their cameras, filming exactly what was happening. And you can ignore one person, but you can't ignore eight to ten people saying the same thing."

On September 9—weeks after the department's deadline to respond to my FOIA had passed—I finally received the police report from CPD. It appears the CPD is quite capable of ignoring multiple people saying the same thing. The three-page document was heavily redacted, and, just as the department spokesman first told me on the phone, presented the situation in a much more benign light than the reality. Officers Cunningham, Surgal, and two others who signed off on the report listed Greenspire as the "victim" of the "non-criminal" incident. Four individuals were listed as "person reporting offense": men whose demographic information matched Rufo and the second ex-cop, Greenspire's property manager Luis Lopez, and Sam.

The narrative states that Sam "believed" that Greenspire's people "were attempting to evict him by threat of violence during the COVID pandemic." And that he told officers "that his property management company illegally gained entry into his residence and did plumbing work without his knowledge or permission." The report goes on to say that after talking to Lopez, officers "learned that [Sam] made threats of violence against him in [the] past that made him unwilling to return to do work on the unit without security present." According to the report Greenspire "went into the residence to perform emergency plumbing repairs," and that while that was happening the security guys saw Sam going upstairs and were "concerned for the safety of the maintenance worker. In an attempt to stop [Sam] [redacted] displayed a handgun and gave him an order to stop." The officers reiterated Greenspire's claim that their people were only there to fix the plumbing and had to "cut the locks to gain entry to the unit because the resident was not responding to messages."

A woman matching Lisa Martin's description was the only listed witness. This is how her story was described: "stated that she observed the entirety of the disturbance and that [Sam] was coming back to his residence when [redacted] for the property stopped him and attempted to keep him from going to his apartment because [redacted] was still [redacted]. The witness stated she observed the men fall down the stairs together, and one of [redacted] point his weapon at [redacted]."

Her account was then dismissed: "Upon watching the video that [Lopez] had recorded on his phone, while [redacted] was on the stairs with [redacted] before, during and after the fall down the stairs, no guns were drawn."

"That is not at all accurate to what I said," Martin texted me after I sent her a recap of the report. "It also sounds like they took a whole bunch of people's statements and cobbled them together in such a way as to make it appear that the two fake or prior police officers were specifically not at fault and that nothing illegal happened."

The report made no mention of other available video evidence or other witnesses who gave statements to Cunningham. It also made it seem as though Lopez's video contradicted Martin's account, when in reality Lopez didn't even start filming the incident until after Rufo and the other ex-cop had marched Sam out of his home at gunpoint and told him to "get the fuck out." Had the cops taken me up on the offer to share the video I'd made they would have seen that.

CPD "is committed to protecting the rights and safety of tenants and landlords. That's why the Department is in communication with the Chicago Department of Housing and Cook County Sheriff's Office to ensure that all officers are not only trained but following protocol pertaining to the state's evictions moratorium," spokesman Don Terry e-mailed in response to my questions about the report. "While we cannot comment on individual allegations, the Department is reviewing all procedures regarding this incident to ensure they were properly followed. If there are any photos, video footage or evidence material that depicts wrongdoing on the part of the private security guards, as you suggest in your questions, we encourage you to provide that material with CPD so we can ensure any individuals who may have committed a crime are held accountable."

The next day Lisa Martin got a call from CPD's Internal Affairs Bureau with a request for another interview about the situation.

For decades, whistleblowers, journalists, academics, and ordinary people have produced voluminous records on police misconduct in Chicago. The way cops cover for each other and the "code of silence" among them is well-known and well-documented.

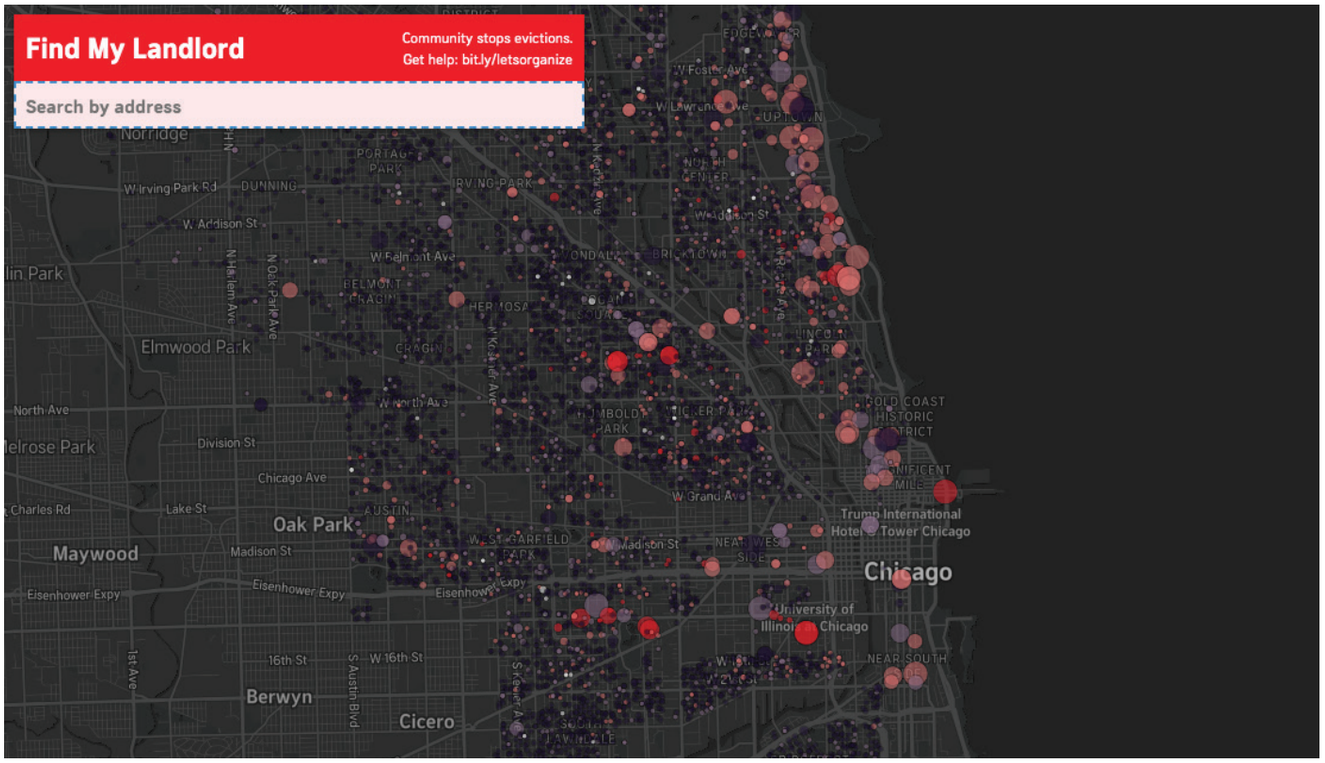
The thing about the July 30 incident was that, in front of the watchful eyes of many witnesses, the 24th District officers actually did the things police reform advocates say that they need to: They de-escalated the situation, treated all the parties involved courteously, called the balls and strikes. They were correct in stopping what appeared to be an unauthorized eviction, and correctly explained the law to Greenspire. They made sure that the more vulnerable party could exercise his rights and left the scene without funneling anyone into the criminal-legal pipeline.

Yet this approach was mobilized primarily to protect the most powerful people on the scene—the ex-cops and the landlord—from consequences. The cops' actions also benefited Sam, but how could anyone hope to successfully press criminal charges or sue a landlord claiming an illegal eviction attempt if the official record of the incident doesn't even mention it? On paper, Greenspire isn't a corporation that apparently attempted a lockout because they couldn't get what they wanted from the courts. On paper, the ex-cops who claimed they were police and extracted a person from his home at gunpoint don't exist. In the end, Marty still couldn't get his possessions, the neighbors in the building were still left to deal with Sam's antisocial behavior, and the rest of us were left feeling less safe in our neighborhood.

This was just a little thing that happened in a little corner of the city to a little group of relatively well-off people. As vulnerable as Sam may be, he's still a white man. As confused and helpless as the neighbors might have felt, they still knew a journalist to help them figure things out and reach some officials. As pissed as Greenspire and Sam's neighbors might be at the failure to get him out of their hair, CPD would still answer their calls the next time Sam became too much. What happened on July 30 would hardly register on the Richter scale of police discrimination, violence, and cover-ups in Chicago. The thing about misconduct on the job, though, is that most of it tends to be mundane. It happens in small ways on a daily basis—looking the other way when a friend or acquaintance or former colleague does something wrong; giving people who seem nice and respectable a pass for things someone less likable would never get away with. Isn't that what broken windows policing advocates have been arguing for decades—that leniency toward small instances of misbehavior builds up tolerance for more serious misconduct? If we only pay attention to the big cover-ups, the big scandals, we risk overlooking the systemic nature of the abuse of power. There aren't any "bad apples" in this story (other than, arguably, Sam), just privileged people doing what they feel entitled to do. The grace and benefit of the doubt they receive from authorities is a tacit sanction of their behavior.

Around 11 PM on Saturday, August 29, a platoon of 24th District cops descended on Farwell Avenue, their SUVs clogging the entire block. Sam had apparently broken a wall with an adjoining condo unit. His neighbor was on the third-floor landing of the back stairs, venting about how impossible it was to live next door to the guy. The neighbors watched as dozens and dozens of cops milled around. Somewhere in the center of the sea of uniformed officers was a voice, intermittently explaining something calmly and bursting into shouts of "Help!" and "I can't breathe!" and "Get the fuck out, monster!" His hands were cuffed behind his back and the police eventually loaded him into a transport van. A woman who lives in a neighboring building sighed as we slowly dispersed. She said one of the officers told her they were taking him to a psych hospital. Sam was back in his apartment just a few days later.

@mdoukmas



The larger the dot, the larger the building. FIND MY LANDLORD

HOUSING

How many buildings does your landlord own?

A database matches rental properties with owners, whether they like it or not.

By Grace Del Vecchio

In August the Chicago chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (CDSA) launched the interactive database Find My Landlord. The website features a map of rental properties across the city. The owners, along with their properties, can be found via the search function. All data is available for download.

The dark map is covered in an array of red and peach and purple and black dots. The larger the dot, the larger the building. In the bottom right corner of the page sits a key, which indicates how many properties a landlord owns, organized by color.

While the website's technical functions seem straightforward, the process behind it was far from simple. The databases' creators, while seasoned in web development, undertook a long and arduous process to make publicly available data actually accessible and digestible.

"That information is technically publicly available," said Ivy Abid, a member of CDSA and a high school computer science teacher. "But it's not collected and quantified in a way that we can analyze it. You can do an individual lookup of an address, but you can't see a trend." Abid was responsible for compiling the data now featured on the site. "So it was really important to create a source for that. And people have tried to do it before, but it's really hard because developers and landlords take all these steps to obscure ownership and obscure their identity."

In March, as the coronavirus pandemic thrust millions of Americans into economic uncertainty, CDSA began to focus more efforts around tenant organizing and joined the citywide coalition Chicago Tenants Movement. While all the data behind Find My Landlord is public, the most concise database made with the information so far is a private one used by real estate agents, realinfo.net. CDSA bought a subscription to the website and used it to provide data for tenants. Abid wanted to take on the painstaking task of making it a public tool. There's a reason this has never been done before.

Only two people, Abid and Theo Noomah, compiled the data. First Abid had to retrieve data from the Cook County Assessor's website, match the properties with the landlords, and then verify and fact-check all the information by cross-referencing it through a lookup tool on the Illinois Secretary of State's website, the Department of Buildings, and the Cook County recorder of deeds. If that sounds confusing and tedious, it's because it is. Matching landlords with the properties required a team of volunteer researchers to fact-check the data.

"The matching is the tricky part because you'll have an owner like Pangea where it's in their best interest to create a separate limited liability corporation for every single building they own. So that if a particular tenant in a particular building sues, it doesn't bring down their entire corporation," said Abid. "That makes it really difficult to do matching. Or to figure out who an owner is."

So instead of looking up the address of the property owned by the landlord—often hidden under different names—Abid and Noomah looked up the taxpayer address. All of the properties owned by a single landlord had the same taxpayer address, which was then linked to the landlord.

Lucien Liz-Lepiorz, a member of CDSA who manages the technology team at the insurance company Allstate, built the front and back ends of the website. On the bottom right of the page is a link to "Improve our Data." Visitors to the website can then use that function to e-mail corrections to Abid and Liz-Lepiorz. Abid said multiple people have already contacted them and that they're still figuring out how to streamline the process.

Abid and Liz-Lepiorz also made sure that tenants who visited were able to connect themselves to organizing resources. Above the search bar is a line that reads "Community stops eviction" with a link to sign up, sponsored by the Autonomous Tenants Union. They have also helped train 30 volunteers with the Chicago Tenants Movement which has a hotline open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 AM to 2 PM and 5 PM to 9 PM.

When tenants decide to organize against a landlord, they usually begin in their immediate surroundings, the building and the community. Sometimes, however, the building only represents a fraction of what the landlord actually owns. "What we've seen especially during the pandemic is a lot of people in different buildings with the same owner are coming together and forming landlord-wide tenant unions," said Abid.

Even before the conception of Find My Landlord, a group of renters made use of the data. In April, as a result of the economic instability made worse by the pandemic, tenants of the property company A. Saccone

& Sons came together in Logan Square to form the Saccone Renters Union. Through the Lift The Ban Coalition, CDSA was able to access and share the raw data set from realinfo.net with the Saccone Renters Union, which in turn improved Abid's data set. Once the union members had access to the data, they used the same process of matching the landlord to property, all while navigating the various aliases of property owners.

Sean Duffy, one of the tenant organizers and a member of CDSA, joined the union soon after its formation. At that time, the renters identified properties owned by A. Saccone & Sons by the signs that hung outside of the building. They had no idea how many buildings were actually owned by the company.

Still, the issue of landlords shrouding themselves in anonymity persisted. Searching for the name A. Saccone & Sons on realinfo.net returned inconclusive results. "The names a building is owned under will vary because usually landlords including A. Saccone & Sons, they don't own it as A. Saccone & Sons. They'll own it as 2848 North California LLC," said Duffy. While A. Saccone & Sons was not listed as the owner of any properties, the company utilizes the same tax address for all of its properties.

"We found 110, a little over that, properties where the tax address is A. Saccone & Sons's address," said Duffy. The union has members from 12 of those properties, and has now grown to over 50 members.

"If you're a tenant and your landlord isn't just, you know, some guy who lives in your building, isn't just some family that owns like two or three properties, but is a real large landlord—whether or not you have a good relationship with them, whether or not they've always treated you nicely—you should be organizing fellow tenants," said Duffy.

To Duffy, Abid, and Liz-Lepiorz, union is power. Find My Landlord provides tenants with the tools to build solidarity and take collective action. Abid said the data also enables renters to see patterns in where landlords are buying properties, and if they are actively gentrifying neighborhoods and displacing residents. Liz-Lepiorz said that the website is a lot like the Citizens Police Data Project. "You can look up police officers, see their misconduct complaints, and it's a very tactical use," said Liz-Lepiorz. "You want to find a cop and you want to find out what the record is? Same with this website. You want to find a building, see who owns it. But there's a secondary effect where people who aren't out to find something end up discovering, you know, what the reality of the city is.

"You end up seeing, 'wow, all these buildings that are around me are owned by people that own hundreds more buildings.' And so by seeing all this inequity in terms of ownership and land property, even though I may pay my rent and that's how I interact with my landlord, by default, I'm affected by their predatory behavior towards other renters."

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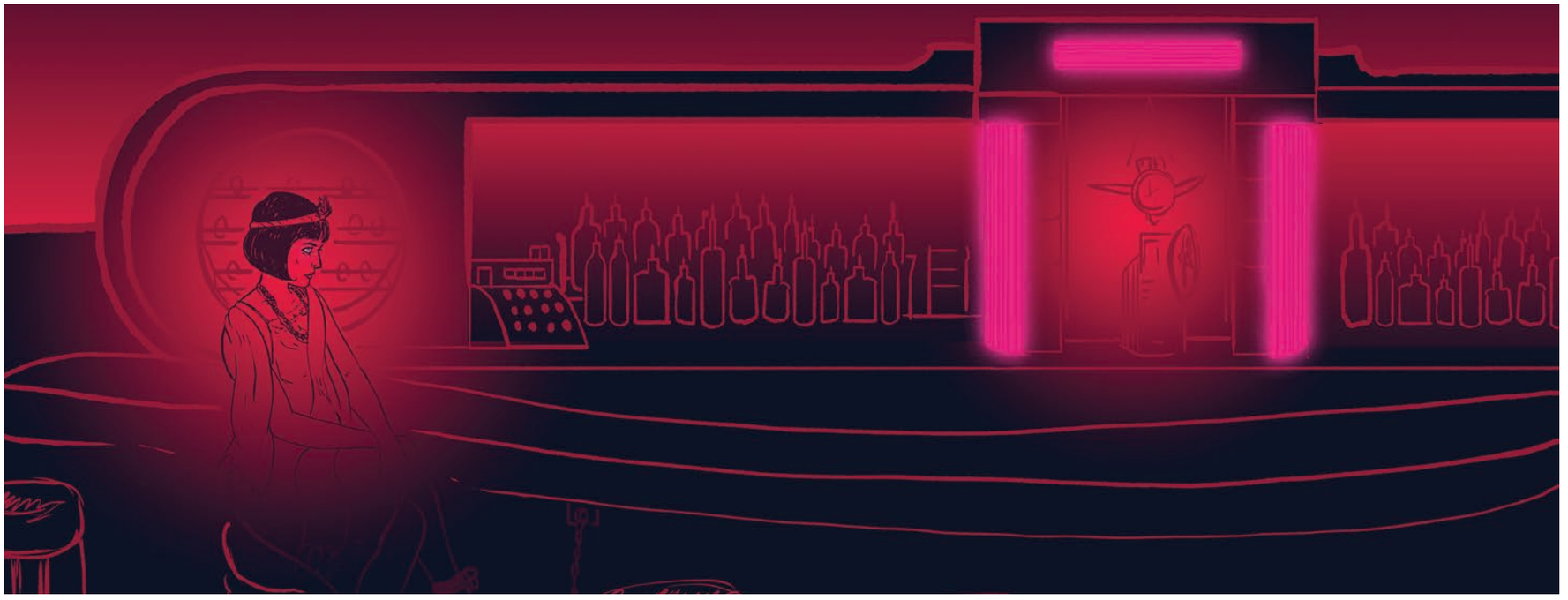


GHOSTS

The lingering spirits of the California Clipper

The neighborhood tavern may be closed, but it's forever a part of Chicago's boozy, haunted history.

By Micco Caporale

When news broke in May that the California Clipper was permanently closing, people began to talk. Not just about the circumstances of the bar's closure—which owner and boutique restaurateur Brendan Sodikoff claimed was due to the financial strain of the pandemic—but about the bar's history, too.

Most believe the Clipper was originally a nickelodeon that shuttered because of the 1918 flu pandemic. Many believe it's haunted, too, because that's the kind of place the Clipper is: a fountain for fascinating stories. But much like the bar's closure announcement, all Clipper stories contain a drop of truth amidst a pool of speculation—ones that reveal more about Chicago and culture than about the tavern itself.

In interviews with more than half a dozen former Clipper employees spanning the last 20 years, "David Lynch" is used as a descriptor of the space almost every time. "David Lynch turned sideways," one person says. "Patsy Cline meets David Lynch," says another. Even patrons describe it as a place where time doesn't feel linear. Its air sizzles with an expectation that past and present might collide in surprising, even unnerving ways, making it a likely place for something spooky.

Early into her year-and-a-half as a bartender there, Chelsea Foss-Ralston heard rumors about a ghost. One of her opening duties included sagging the space, and coworkers would tease it was to clear lingering spirits. If something unexpected happened, like a mop falling over, someone might joke, "Clipper ghost!" Occasionally, she'd meet adventurers on self-guided ghost tours who'd ask about the lore. The bar is included in two books on Windy City haunts, and in the aughts, its website used to advertise a woman in white who'd appear to "freak out management."

But then Foss-Ralston started to have experiences: things like hearing phantom knocking and footsteps, even one night losing her garage door opener only to find it placed on her driver seat in the morning. These encounters convinced her it was more than talk, and she's not the only former employee with such accounts.

"Ghosts are liminal (between here and there, between now and then)," writes Dr. Tok Thompson, an anthropology professor at University of Southern California and folklore expert. "So often they appear at liminal places. Ghost stories are interesting to me in the way they express the 'shadow side' of history. They often can contain truths that official histories do not."

The Clipper is an ideal site for a ghost—or at least a ghost story—because as far as official histories go, it doesn't have much of one. Or rather, the one it has is markedly incomplete. It's true that it started as a turn-of-the-century movie theater. There are sub-basements in the area similar to those beneath the Green Mill and a false wall in the bar, too, prompting suspicion it might have been a speakeasy during Prohibition, which collapses the Clipper into beloved Chicago mythology

When the Clipper's landlord Gino Battaglia bought the building nearly 20 years ago, part of its appeal was its hazy, storied past. He likes that it's still a true tavern—a holdover from a pre-Mayor Daley time when liquor licenses weren't contingent on serving food, and bars commonly functioned as neighborhood hearths. Rumors swirled that bootlegger Baby Face Nelson—born only a half block south on California Avenue—had maybe used the bar as part of his operation. While very likely untrue, Battaglia likes that it feels like it *could* be true. Lots of patrons did.

Alas, the movie theater chapter of the Clipper's long life was not actually ended by the flu pandemic. Relative to now, few businesses permanently closed then because the 1918 quarantine only lasted a few weeks, and anything not associated with nightlife (like movie theaters) quickly reopened. Newspaper ads in the *Tribune* reveal the theater was still showing films early into the 20s. Then in 1927, a for sale ad at 1002 N. California boasted a 300-seat movie theater and a side space for a beauty shop. (Presumably, this is what the false wall was for.) But the persistence of rumors that it closed in 1918 reminds people of the cultural toll pandemics take.

It likely wasn't a speakeasy, either. Contrary to many people's belief, beer barons didn't build any tunnels beneath Chicago, just exploited ones that already existed. The ones underneath California and Augusta were likely part of a larger freight network that moved coal, housed telephone wires, and even funneled cool air into large gathering spaces such as movie theaters. But according to Battaglia, there's no indicator the Clipper had direct access to such tunnels.

Some speculate a Walgreens shared a wall with the Clipper. Pharmacies could legally sell

FRANK OKAY

booze, making this a convenient Prohibition workaround. But property records show this also isn't true; the nearest pharmacy—a family operation—was a block away, and alcohol prescriptions were so expensive, no one in the working class Humboldt Park of the 1920s could have made a habit of them. But the fact that so many ghost stories are associated with the bar is itself a holdover of Prohibition.

As legend goes, a woman in white haunts booths one and nine, as well as the women's restroom, and her rose-like perfume chases lingering drunks at close. Foss-Ralston thinks the ghost is a woman from one of the photographs on the wall of the bar who's never been identified. According to the *Chicago Haunted Handbook*, a manager brought in a psychic in the mid-aughts who said something similar.

"The woman in white was waiting for her beau who went to war and never returned," says Jessi Meliza, a long-time patron who ran a trivia night there for a year.

"A young woman gets dressed up and goes to the Clipper for a date she's excited about," recounts Stephen Spataro, who worked at the Clipper for more than a decade. "He stands her up, and she gets so distraught, she runs out and gets hit by a car. Now she haunts the place."

According to Daniel Majid, who also worked at the Clipper for more than a decade, first-time customers would go to the bathroom—most often the women's one—then return and say, "Is this place haunted?" Or they'd remark on their hair standing on end, the place feeling a little eerie.

Amidst all the accounts, two themes emerge: the ghost is always a woman, and she's often heartbroken.

"[Ghost stories of heartbroken women] are a common thread in many cultures," says Thompson, the USC anthropologist, "particularly patriarchal ones where a woman's place in society is heavily dependent on marriage."

Temperance was born, in part, from women organizing to deal with alcoholism's impact on their families. If booze wasn't so readily available, they contended, their husbands wouldn't undermine their security by, say, losing their jobs or becoming violent. In this light, it makes sense why people might perceive or imagine a female ghost scaring off drunks with her perfume.

But the way the story varies expresses a plurality of ideas about women, too—the toll WWII took on women's security and livelihoods, for example. Changing attitudes about women even persist in stories of one of the Clipper's former owners.

In 1937, the Caporusso siblings—Gus, Joe, and Antonia—bought the building and opened the Clipper Tavern. Gus died in the 1950s, but Joe and Antonia continued running it until the late 90s, when Joe died and Antonia retired. (She continued living in the building until she passed around 2010.) Tales of the bar's life pre-1999, when Max Brumbach bought it and transformed it into the California Clipper, all center on Antonia.

In one, cops come in to shut down an illegal gambling night. "OK, OK, everybody out," they say, but Antonia grabs a gun and says, "No, *you* get out." In another, she refuses to serve women who come in unescorted. "Harlots," she supposedly called them.

They're anecdotes that reveal less about who Antonia was than ideas of what Humboldt Park—and women in it—were becoming. As a myth, she gets to be a brazen outlaw who puts her financial stakes above the law as much as a strict enforcer of traditional gender roles. A woman who's tough enough to provide for her family and come out strong in a changing, often turbulent neighborhood. But she's not so tough that her job interferes with her or other women's abilities to have a family.

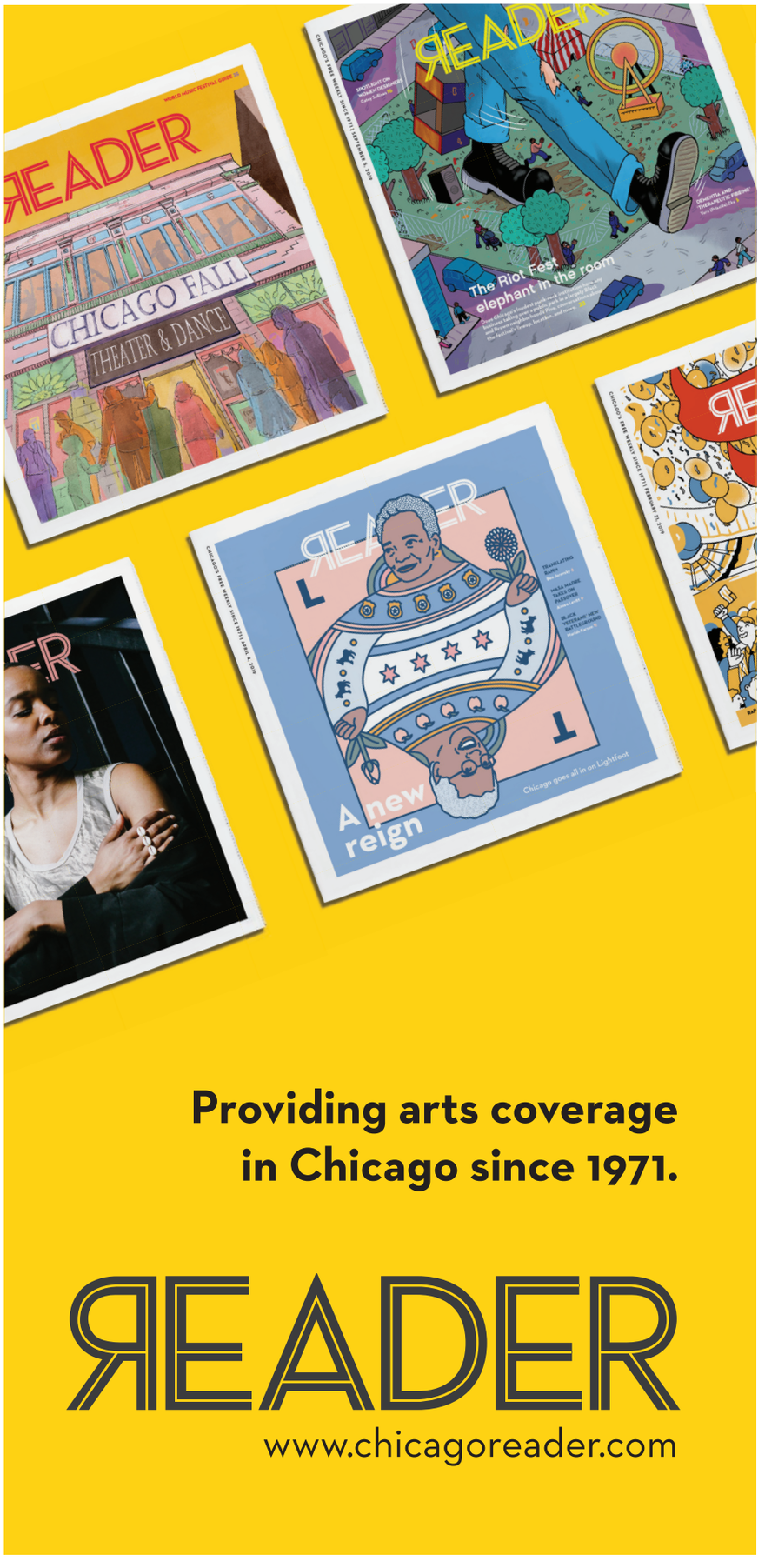
That stories of imbibing persist as threatening marriage or performing idealized womanhood might be the scariest part of all.

All the talk of ghosts makes Battaglia chuckle. "One of our tenants has been living there 22 years," he says. "A lot, seven to ten years. We rarely have a vacant apartment. Certainly nobody scared off by ghosts!"

Battaglia's proud of the relationships he has built with his tenants, which made it all the more wrenching when Sodikoff announced he was closing the Clipper, a neighborhood bar that's become a local institution, and retaining rights to the name. According to Battaglia, he offered Sodikoff ample rent relief, but he believes Sodikoff was just looking for an excuse to break his lease. (Hogsalt Hospitality, the group that owns the Clipper, did not respond to an interview request.) Now they're duking it out in court.

While the future of the California Clipper is unclear, one thing is very obvious: there's something about 1002 N. California that makes it a mirror for local fantasies and anxieties. And that's something that will endure regardless of what comes next.

@miccoslays



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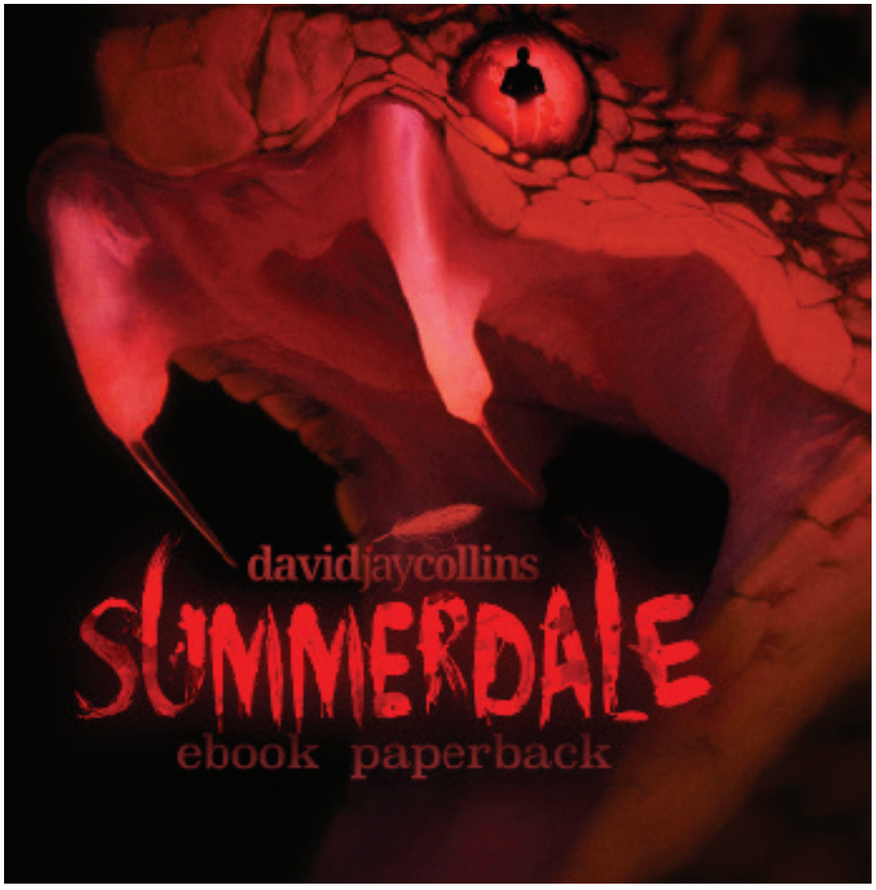

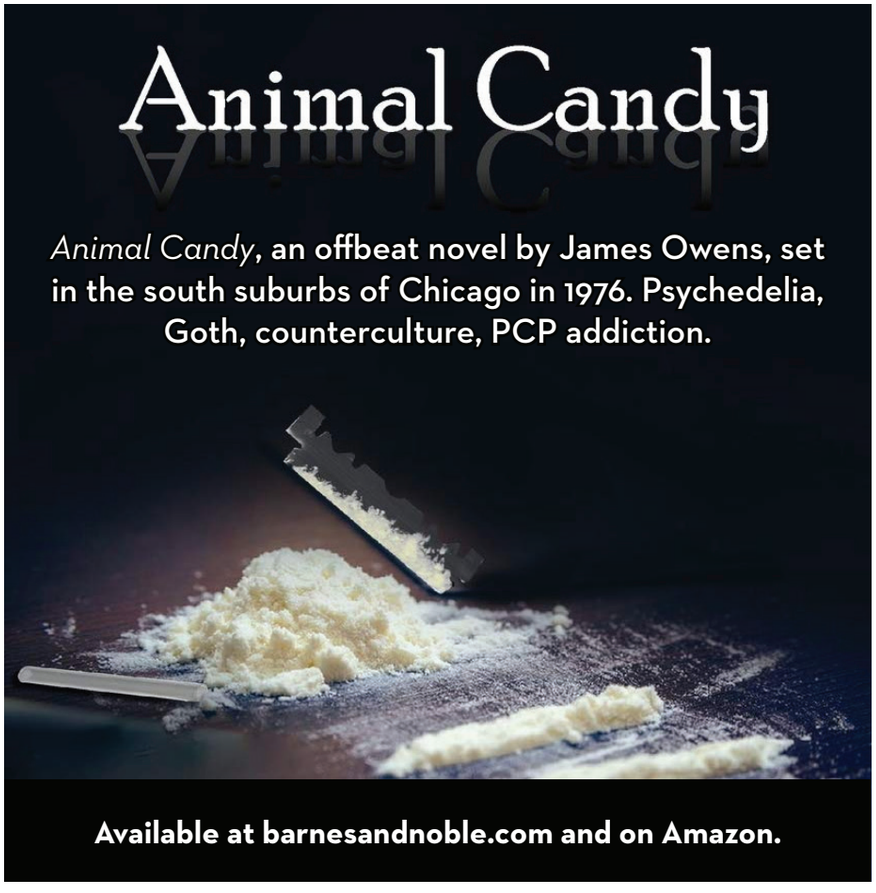

HOUSING

The Folded Map Project shows a segregated city

Tonika Johnson's multimedia project expands with a new film.

By S. Nicole Lane

"I'm sure you've heard the words to describe Englewood are 'Black, dangerous, poor, gun violence,'" says Tonika Johnson in one of the opening lines of her short film, *The Folded Map Project*. Englewood is where Johnson was born and it's where she still lives. Englewood is home.

In her film, Johnson asks the viewer to think about how they came to live in the neighborhood where they live or to think about the neighborhood where they grew up. She asks viewers to think about how they decided to live where they do. Who did they talk to before making the decision?

My move from Hyde Park to Back of the Yards happened a year ago and I'm still thinking about my decision, why I chose to move, and what led to these changes. When I moved from Hyde Park my friends seemed to mourn the change more than me. "I just can't believe you won't be a Hyde Parker anymore," they would say. It was as if I was moving state lines instead of only a few miles away.

It's fitting, then, that Johnson's *The Folded Map Project* asks me—and all viewers—these questions in her introduction. Chicago is a city of neighborhoods. What started as a photography project in 2017 while she was a photojournalism fellow at City Bureau has transformed into a short film, which Johnson says will eventually be a long-form film. Johnson originally began photographing "address pairs" where she looked at housing differences in the city and then "map twins" who live on the north and south sides of Chicago along the same street with the same address. If you fold the map of Chicago at its zero point, the streets that connect the north side and south side—like Englewood to Edgewater—are separated by 15 miles within the same city. For example, someone living at 6900 North Ashland in Rogers Park and 6900 South Ashland in West Englewood are map twins. She interviewed the individuals living in specific houses and introduced them to one another, creating a dialogue for folks to confront racial and institutional segregation in Chicago. Johnson uses prompts like, "How much did your house cost?" or "Why did you move to this neighborhood?" and the differences (or similarities) unfold. In 2018 an exhibition of "The Folded Map Project" was presented at Loyola University Museum of Art and that same year, it was also turned

Nanette, south side Englewood resident and Wade, north side Edgewater resident, pose together on Wade's front porch and in front of the other's home. TONIKA JOHNSON

into a play presented through Collaboraction, which had four sold-out shows at Kennedy-King College. Johnson also has plans to create a curriculum around the project for Chicago Public Schools and for a future west side study, folding the map for streets traveling west to east, then photographing, interviewing, and introducing those residents as she did with the north and south sides.

Crossing one bridge can propel you into a new circle of people and culture. Intersections and cross streets are linchpins for communities. Bus stops, train stations, and bike routes connect us and divide us. What develops in Johnson's film is a beautiful telling of what it means to live in a neighborhood with your family and peers. It all stemmed from her grandmother, who purchased a house in Englewood, where Johnson grew up with her mom and two uncles. "My childhood was beautiful," says Johnson as the short film shows slides of images of her grandmother, herself, and even a neighbor who lived next door.

Two weeks ago, I drove from my apartment down 47th street through New City, Fuller Park, Bronzeville, and Hyde Park for a beach day at the Point. From paleta carts to parents with strollers, the view transformed as I drove along the long road to the lakefront. Similarly, during her early commute to Lane Tech, Johnson recalls noticing the changing of neighborhoods along her bus ride north. She explains how on this bus ride she realized not all Chicago neighborhoods are the same. Although street signs and street names read the same from north to south, they looked entirely different.

In her four years at Lane Tech, where her new friends were of Polish, Latino, Asian, and Jamaican descent, Johnson was invested in learning about the neighborhoods and cultures that mold Chicago into what it is. This continued into adulthood when she decided, in order to change the racist conversation surrounding Black neighborhoods and the stereotype of their being "war-torn" or using nicknames like "Chiraq," to literally fold the map of Chicago.

On September 5, the *New York Times* published an article detailing the inequality in America by white Minneapolis-based photographer, Alec Soth, using many of the identical locations as Johnson. Soth posted a public apology on Instagram acknowledging Johnson's project. Soth explained that the editors of the opinion section of the *New York Times* reached out to him and asked for a photo essay based on the segregation of neighborhoods in Chicago. Johnson contacted him and he ultimately said, "I apologize to Tonika Lewis Johnson and very much regret accepting this assignment." He also mentioned that all income he receives from the *New York Times* will be donated to the Folded Map Project. The opinion editor has issued an edit that recognizes Johnson's work and directs readers to her project.

Despite this apology, it's a significant example of transgression and infringement of Black America and how white folks profit from the ideas, art, and culture of Black folks. Johnson told *The Art Newspaper* that it was her "wish and a goal" to have her work featured in the *New York Times* but now it's "taken a real twist."

Johnson's work is a long-term research project looking at the city she lives in and visually exemplifying the institutional racism and segregation among the 77 neighborhoods. In her film, Johnson mentions how she wants to get at the heart of what brings people to a neighborhood, or what forces them into one. She asks the tough but simple questions: What can be done to combat systemic racism? How do economics and discrimination affect your life? Chicago's segregation shouldn't affect how we interact as a city, but it does. Johnson is seeking out the answers and asking others to help brainstorm solutions to the deeply rooted racism that impacts Chicago's grid of neighborhoods.

"I played outside everyday. I rode my bike with my friends. I met my first friends in life," recalls Johnson about her childhood growing up in Englewood. It's an image far different than the one painted in news headlines. She says that you truly get to know Chicago's neighborhoods through friendships and connections. And by connecting folks with the project, she hopes to open everyone's eyes and hearts to an integrated Chicago.

The Folded Map Project short film will be available for purchase (suggested donation) and downloaded on the Folded Map Project website in 2021. The exhibition of images of "The Folded Map Project" are available on Johnson's website.

@snicolelane

POETRY CORNER

The Other Word for Love

by Lisa Alvarado

Writing about Chicago is like trying to find the other word for love.
It makes you reach into that wordless place.
It pisses you off and breaks your heart in the worst and best ways.

The rip of traffic above you when you walk on the Riverfront.
Sleek, green gold buildings waver in the blue artery of water.
You daywalk and daydream past the beautiful people, but you get them.
Just like you get the guy at Jimmy's Red Hots who knows EXACTLY
how to drag your dog in the garden.

And you get the Brown and Black faces on the California bus
going south of Odgen, and you understand not to look too long at anyone,
before they spill out toward little factories with no signs and Cook County Jail.
And you get the smiling, shiny, White Ravenswood riders.
You may not like them, but you get them, and they always have the best coffee.

I'm not getting any closer to the other word for love, but you get the idea.

There is always, always, the firm rocks along the Lake at Fullerton,
pulling you, anchoring you.
It never fails, and you catch your breath at the blue
that's the water and the sky at the same time.

Chicago is a red-brown two-flat in Albany Park where you learned what true sorrow was,
and that you could put words to it,
and you could call yourself your own name.

Lisa Alvarado is a poet, novelist, journalist, editor. She identifies herself as Chicana/Italian/Bi/Jew/Aleyo. Alvarado's books include Reclamó, The Housekeeper's Diary, Raw Silk Suture, *and* Still, Life. *Before being named Hispanic Author of the Year in 2009, Alvarado co-authored the novel* Sister Chicas *with Ann Hagman Cardinal and Jane Alberdeston Coralín.*

Curator: Tara Betts is the author of two poetry collections, Break the Habit, Arc & Hue, and the forthcoming Refuse to Disappear. She also co-edited The Beiging of America and edited a critical edition of Philippa Duke Schuyler's Adventures in Black and White. In addition to her work as a teaching artist and mentor for young poets, she's taught at prisons and several universities, including Rutgers University and University of Illinois-Chicago. In 2019, Tara published a poem celebrating Illinois' bicentennial with Candor Arts. Tara is the Poetry Editor at The Langston Hughes Review and the Lit Editor at Newcity. Betts is currently hard at work to establish The Whirlwind Center on Chicago's South Side.

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HOME MOVIE

We're Gonna Die—just ask Y

Theatre Y turns Young Jean Lee's play into a meditative film.

By Irene Hsiao

There's a video of Young Jean Lee performing her 2011 play *We're Gonna Die* on Vimeo. It's an exercise in minimalism and mortality: a single person with a mike backed up by a band—part stand-up, part rock concert, part TED talk, and part campfire confession—relaying a series of humiliating, horrifying, gory, and mundane incidents-in-the-life-of, and Lee is brilliant: eyes dry, voice wry, bangs on her face, feet on the ground, and a pocket full of tunes that worm their way into your ear. With the murmur of the crowd in the room, that video is a relic of a time and place we won't reenter soon. Just before lockdown began, a production of *We're Gonna Die* was playing off Broadway at the Second Stage Theater, one of the last houses to go dark in New York. And while sheltering in place, Theatre Y embarked upon making a film of the work, intentionally a piece by and for plague times.

Director Héctor Álvarez read Lee's play in February, at a funeral. "My wife's grandmother passed away. She was 99, and, while very sad, it was not a surprise. We flew to Ohio for the memorial service," he says. "On the way back, I read the play. The story deals with loneliness, rejection, decay, and death, but it was also a celebration of the small things in life. I felt strangely at peace and comforted by it." The same weekend, his own grandmother in Spain was diagnosed with the virus.

"My mom tested positive. Then uncles and cousins. It spread like a wildfire." With summer plans to direct a show coproduced with the contemporary dance company the Cambrians ("about extinction and the fragility of life") facing likely cancellation, Álvarez proposed a film of Lee's play as an alternative just two days before Chicago locked down.

"At the time, I was totally untouched by COVID," says Theatre Y artistic director Melissa Lorraine. "I knew we were heading to feeling much closer to death than we did at that moment. Héctor was ahead of us in terms of having it land. If it comforted him, it [stood] to reason that it may comfort others as we get further into this pandemic."

Armed with Álvarez's perspective on events in Europe and charged with an injunction by Lee that no one be exposed to sick-

We're Gonna Die JUSTIN JONES

ness during the process, Theatre Y dove into creating remotely. "I invited Emily [Bragg, who plays the narrator] to live with us immediately," says Lorraine. "I said, 'Move into our living room. I just have the feeling we're never coming out again, and if you don't move into my house right now, we're never going to be able to interact!"

The process of creating the film, which was shot on a professional camera as well as an iPhone, was dictated by the terms of isolation, with everyone working asynchronously to create a visual and sonic environment for a character, who was also developed in solitude over a series of assignments Álvarez designed. "I would share provocations with Emily," he explains. "I would give her a couple of hours to create something and send it back to me. For example, I asked her to compile a list of 50 sounds that were comforting to her. I asked her to create tableaux or object arrangements for each of the stories"—elements that eventually made their way into the film.

The result is a peculiarly lonely and elliptical telling of Lee's play, a set of images characterized by still life and time-lapse, occurring in the confines and cubbyholes of an interior packed with memorabilia that still manage to move. A curiosity shop of photographs, cards, candles, and tchotchkes tell the bulk of the story, and Bragg's articulate body, when it intervenes into the action, almost seems to become another one of these objects. Never seen to speak, with her face always partially or entirely obscured, the sense of her absence and thus of all we miss of theater and each other is poignant and potently present.

"We were very keen to embrace the idea of the absent performer and the absent body," says Álvarez. "That gave us the idea of using object theater as one of the languages." The film references theatrical methods and devices throughout: "Emily is often wearing a mask. That's a commentary on COVID and everyone wearing masks but also it's hearkening back to the mask of theater! I was also inspired by a form of Japanese street theater called *kamishibai*, which means 'paper play.' Storytellers would set up a cardboard box proscenium on a street corner with painted boards, and they would narrate a story to children while changing the images. That is a technique we used in the film. When we become interlopers in a different medium, we honor the baggage we bring with us."

Through Zoom meetings, Theatre Y kept several longtime collaborators close, including Kyle Gregory Price, whose cheery arrangements of the songs telescope Lee's rock band aesthetic down to the intimacy of home.

Like live performance, Theatre Y's production of *We're Gonna Die* has a finite number of showings. And Lorraine insists that, despite their foray into film, including a series of Andràs Visky shorts, as well as a film of his *Juliet* to be released this November, Theatre Y exists to create theater. "Some artists say, 'I don't do virtual. You'll see me when we're back in the flesh,'" notes Lorraine. "Is that acceptable, knowing we have a whole society starving for something right now? Can we innovate, or is that reducing the art form? Knowing how to take care of the form during this crisis is really hard."

"Our task, our duty, is to be the frequency of the times and filter the turmoil and suffering and noise through your imagination and give something back to the world," says Álvarez. "The crises we're living through are morally asking artists to respond in some way."

"I think it's important to all of us that the work we make is life-giving," says Lorraine. "I hope people feel companionship in the struggle. Artists are asked to make meaning"—("while telling the truth," interjects Álvarez)—"which is a tall order at this time."

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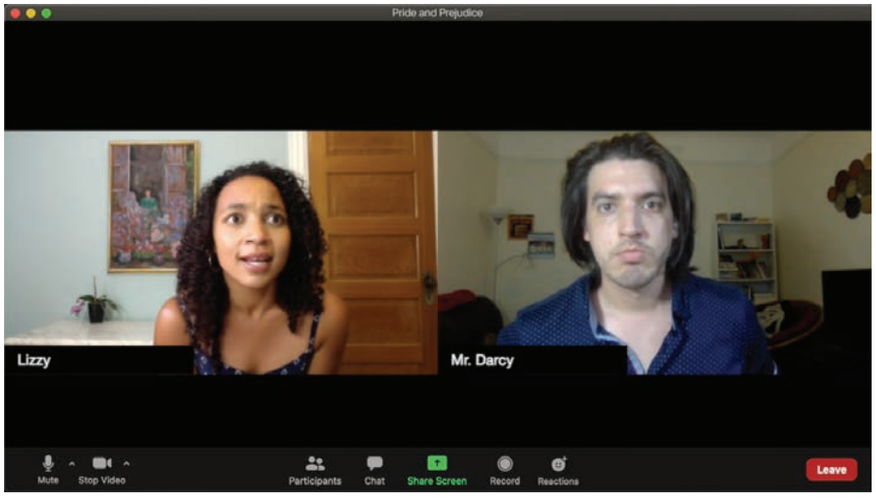

Lifeline's *Pride and Prejudice* COURTESY LIFELINE THEATRE

STREAMING PERFORMANCE

Split-screen theater tears down the digital box

BoHo and Lifeline overcome the limitations of Zoom.

By Kerry Reid

The age of Zoom has created a split-screen metaphor for the changes in our private and public lives. We're separated physically, but the world is invited into our personal spaces in a way that never happened in Cube Farmlandia. For theater pieces created at a distance and for online consumption, the dichotomy feels even more keen.

RR *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Pride and Prejudice*
The Pursuit of Happiness, available anytime through bohotheatre.com, free.
Pride and Prejudice, through 10/4, available Thu-Sun anytime during the weekend of purchase, lifelinetheatre.org, $20.

Increasingly, companies producing new work online are leaning into that dichotomy. That's clear in two streaming shows that have premiered in recent weeks: BoHo Theatre's *The Pursuit of Happiness* and Lifeline Theatre's *Pride and Prejudice.*

In content and style, the pieces are completely different. BoHo's show, subtitled *A BoHo Exploration of Freedom*, brings together 17 BIPOC artists under the direction of the company's new executive director, Sana Selemon, in a virtual cabaret of song, spoken word, personal storytelling, and combinations thereof.

The show kicks off with Donterrio Johnson, the artistic director of PrideArts, singing and dancing in an empty theater to "I've Gotta Be Me," a song from the 1968 musical *Golden Rainbow*, composed by Walter Marks and made famous by Sammy Davis Jr. At the end, we see a photo of vaudeville star Bert Williams, who was the first Black artist to have a leading role in a Broadway show. It's an effective way to encapsulate the ways that Black artists have struggled to achieve success in a white-dominated cultural landscape without losing their own identity.

It concludes with Marguerite Mariama, a longtime artist and activist who notes that her political organizing began as a student protesting the "Willis Wagons"—portable classrooms that maintained de facto segregation in Chicago schools. Mariama's recounting of her personal involvement in politics is set against a backdrop of imagery from the civil rights movement and graphic photos of lynchings. (BoHo has a content warning on the site for a reason.) Her rendition of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" reminds us that the notion of "home" as a sanctuary has never been respected for Black people in this nation (the police killings of Breonna Taylor and Botham Jean made that all too clear), while her exhortation to "Stand Up" suggests that getting out of our homes and into the streets is a moral imperative.

Mariama chooses to perform against a solid black drop cloth, with her voice and the archival photos creating the emotional environment. But other performers allow us glimpses into the interior of their homes as well as their histories. (Tony Churchill deserves credit for his excellent editing work at blending all these segments.) Natara Easter performs a spoken-word piece that begins with "Well, I feel free," and then takes us through all the ways she's been made to feel ashamed about her appearance and expression—"the blackest sound in my laugh," her smile, her way of speaking, her hair. (Easter notes that Black boys in her school were as likely to tease her about the latter as her white peers.) Throughout, we see Easter in her home; looking out a window to her backyard, writing in her journal, washing her face in her bathroom, and otherwise claiming herself in her space.

The theme of self-acceptance also comes through in Dillon Chitto's piece about growing up gay and Native American in Santa Fe ("the gayest city in the southwest") and the culture shock of attending a Jesuit seminary in Ohio. (The piece begins with a quick history lesson in how queer or "two-spirit people," who were accepted in Native culture, were labeled as sinful when the colonizing Catholic missionaries arrived.) Chitto tells us that he has "a rosary in one hand, and a bagful of cornmeal in the other," and creates his own personal trinity from "culture, religion, identity."

Whether showing us the interiors of their homes or the inner workings of learning to blossom as a BIPOC artist, *The Pursuit of Happiness* is an exhilarating, intimate, and thoughtful 75-minute journey well worth taking. And I can't wait to see all these performers again, live and in public.

Since 1986, Lifeline Theatre has thrice presented Christina Calvit's adaptation of Jane Austen's most beloved novel onstage. But the version available online now works beautifully at suggesting the tensions between private feelings and public behavior that undergird Austen's world. Directed by Lifeline's former artistic director Dorothy Milne, edited by Harrison Ornelas, and featuring a lineup of longtime ensemble members (including delightful real-life couple Katie McLean Hainsworth and Christopher Hainsworth as Mrs. and Mr. Bennet), the piece should resonate equally well with Austen purists (the dialogue remains faithful to the original) and those who are trying to figure out the rules of dating in a socially distanced time and place.

There are few attempts at costuming (save some plastic tiaras donned during various balls), and no attempts at creating a simulacrum of Austen's world in the homes of the performers (though Caroline Andres's period violin music adds delightful aural texture). But the story of Elizabeth Bennet (Samantha Newcomb) and Mr. Darcy (Andrés Enriquez) unfurls with all the wit and fire you could ask for. A moment when Newcomb's Lizzy breaks away from the on-camera world to stride down the sidewalk (the only exterior shot in the piece), intent on visiting her sick sister Jane (Kristina Loy) not only shows us the forthright bull-by-the-horns candor underneath Lizzy's careful exterior, but adds an extra layer of meaning in a time of pandemic and panic.

Taken together, BoHo and Lifeline's productions reveal sophistication in style and material, and an admirable ability to take the limitations of our Zoom-saturated current reality and transform them into something fresh, personal, and wholly entertaining on their own terms.

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Lovecraft Country

SMALL SCREEN

'Pioneering is dangerous'

Housing and the haunting of segregation in *Lovecraft Country*

By Arionne Nettles

Warning: This review contains spoilers.

When HBO's *Lovecraft Country* started filming in Chicago, excitement surrounding the upcoming TV show quickly spread. And halfway through its debut season, the drama delivers on its examination of both supernatural horrors—ghosts, monsters, and magic—and very real ones such as economic inequity, the inhumane treatment of Black bodies in science, and housing segregation. It's all rooted in racism, of course, and racism? It haunts you.

It's eerily familiar. In the 1950s, much like today, Chicago's segregation and the people, policies, and systems behind it were evident as clear dividing lines that dictated who lived, worked, and played where. Decades into the Great Migration, the city's Black population still largely lived in the Black Belt and that strong cultural presence is felt in the city's first appearance in episode one: an all-Black community with Black businesses and Black celebrations.

But, it's in episode three that the deep-seated issues of Chicago housing come into play when heroine Letitia "Leti" Lewis (played by Jurnee Smollett) buys a huge old house on the city's north side. As an opening title card reminds us, "pioneering is dangerous," and to stay in this home, Leti battles both physical and spiritual evil. But as scary as the supernatural storyline may be, nothing is quite as chilling as knowing what a group of Black folks have to face when moving to an all-white neighborhood.

The show is set in 1955, which lands it right in the midst of a string of very real, very violent encounters with white neighbors throughout the city. In Chicago in 1953, white men attacked a Black family in the Trumbull Park Homes housing project on the far southeast side. The Howards, who were fair-skinned, were placed in Trumbull Park because Chicago Housing Authority workers thought Betty Howard was white when she applied. Created in 1937, it was CHA's unwritten policy to keep families segregated by race.

Days after the Howards moved in, the apartment manager realized that the family "might be Negro." That's when the violence started. The Howards had to board up their windows to block the bricks and sulfur candles white people threw through them. Months later, CHA moved in more Black families—intentionally this time—launching riots that lasted for almost a decade.

And before the Howards, there were more incidents of violence caused by white residents aiming to keep Black people out of their neighborhoods: when eight Black families moved into the Fernwood Park housing project in 1947, when the Clarks moved to suburban Cicero in 1951, and even when two white couples, the Bindmans and the Sennetts, moved to Englewood in 1949 and invited over Black guests. In the show, this history would have been top of mind for a Black woman like Leti who is knowingly integrating a community. But like she says to her sister, Ruby, "There's strength in numbers."

At the time, boarding houses were still common in Chicago, and Leti says her decision to purchase the house is to create a space for her, Ruby, and other Black people in need of a place to stay. She moves in her boarders, one being James Baldwin, on a Sunday while most of her neighborhood is at church. But although that conflict is slightly delayed, it's definitely not avoided. Leti's neighbors welcome her and her group with stares and never-ending car horns caused by bricks tied to steering wheels. "Here we go," Ruby tells Leti as they stare back at the white men attempting to intimidate them. "I told you it was going to be Trumbull Park all over again."

As expected, things continue to escalate. Very soon, signs that say, "We are a white community, undesirables must go" are posted in lawns, and it seems one of her adversaries has adjusted the heater to make the house scorching. They're trying to force Leti and her boarders out, and as noted by Atticus "Tic" Freeman (played by Jonathan Majors), excessive heat and noise are the same tactics he used in Korea while in the military.

Still, Leti persists. She throws a huge housewarming party and angry white neighbors glare out their windows as Black folks of all ages swarm in for live music, food, and drinks—Emmett Till and Gil Scott-Heron are among the young guests there.

But the revelry is interrupted when white neighbors burn a cross on Leti's front yard. It's the final straw. A bat-wielding Leti storms out of her house and busts the windows of the cars that, days later, still have their horns going. With the perfect use of Dorinda Clark-Cole's "Take It Back" playing in the background—*"Everything that the devil stole, God's giving it back to me"*—Leti fires back at her neighbors and is arrested and abused by police as they deny receiving any of the 21 complaints she made about the harassment.

Now, while Leti and Tic are fighting racist neighbors, they're also fighting a racist ghost, one who wants them out of the house. To kick *him* out, Leti calls on community; she calls on her ancestors. "I can't live in fear; I won't," Leti says. "I gotta face this world head-on and stick my claim in it."

That attitude was how Black people have attacked housing segregation in Chicago. In subsequent years after the Trumbull riots and others, the fight for fair housing continued as a collective effort. Recognizing that segregation and discrimination had a different face in cities like Chicago than in the south, Martin Luther King Jr.'s time in Chicago was spent on the Chicago Freedom Movement campaign, which centered around ending slums and was a collaboration between the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations in Chicago.

During a 1966 demonstration in Marquette Park, a white neighborhood at the time, hundreds of white people threw rocks and bottles at King and other marchers. He was struck and later told reporters: "I've been in many demonstrations all across the south, but I can say that I have never seen, even in Mississippi and Alabama, mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I'm seeing in Chicago."

More than a half-century later, the city's not-so-invisible lines have shifted but still exist. More than 50 years after the Fair Housing Act of 1968—which prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability—Chicago still ranks high on every list dedicated to identifying the nation's most segregated cities. We still have the same ghosts. We're still haunted by inequity.

@ArionneNettles

NOW PLAYING

RR *All In: The Fight for Democracy*

As someone points out in this timely documentary, if voting were inconsequential, then some people wouldn't be trying so hard to prevent others from doing it. *All In: The Fight for Democracy* is directed by Liz Garbus and Lisa Cortés, and produced in part by Stacey Abrams, who appears as a subject. Impressively researched and concisely reported, the film details the long history of voter suppression in the United States, using as its springboard Abrams's own experience running for governor of Georgia in 2018. It's thorough in its presentation of the multiple forms of voter suppression, from tactics such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter ID laws, to gerrymandering and the recent *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling and its effect on the Voting Rights Act. More compellingly, the film details incidents of outright violence against minorities seeking to exercise their constitutional right. Interwoven throughout is a sort of film within a film about Abrams that positions her as a politician for the new era, one with a specific passion for electoral reform. Political documentaries are a dime a dozen, yet I was moved by how stridently this one's subjects are fighting for people's right to vote. I guess it's a good thing this is an Amazon Studios release; one of the interviewees, historian and educator Carol Anderson, speaks so convincingly that I immediately wanted to buy her book on the matter. (Jokes aside, buy local.) Ultimately, the film's message is to go all in and vote, vote, vote—only once, of course, though it also does a good job debunking the conservative myth of pervasive voter fraud. **—Kathleen Sachs** *102 min. Amazon Prime and Landmark Century Centre Cinema*

RR *Alone*

Alone races toward a rewarding finish. Jessica (Jules Willcox) is a grief-stricken widow hoping to find solace by moving out of the city, but her relocation doesn't go as planned. While towing a U-Haul through the scenic Pacific Northwest, she's almost forced into a head-on collision with a semitruck by a driver who won't let her pass. This incident isn't the last time she'll run into the man behind the wheel either. He becomes more menacing with each encounter, the tension building until he kidnaps and locks her in a cabin. While his motive is unclear, Jessica's will to survive is not. Escaping into the wilderness, she's able to outrun and outsmart her captor in a series of harrowing feats in this fast-paced survival thriller. Anchored by solid performances from all involved, *Alone* is a straightforward success that reminds viewers that their problems are never far behind them. **—Becca James** *100 min. Music Box Theatre Virtual Cinema*

Antebellum

Sharing a smidgen of DNA with *Kindred*, one of Hugo Award-winning science fiction author Octavia Butler's seminal works, *Antebellum* very much wants to say something profound, and ultimately ends up saying, "Racism is bad and Janelle Monáe is fabulous," both of which should be nearly universal truths. Representing the directorial debut for writers Gerard Bush and Christopher Renz, *Antebellum* attempts to create a psychological thriller about modern-day slavery, yet an unripe script and ineffective editing end upcreating two separate narratives without enough connective tissue or thematic thrust to build coherence. The more entertaining half of the film follows Monáe as she saunters through the life of famous activist author Veronica Henley. We watch as she sits for a stunning *Vogue* photoshoot: switching out gorgeous outfits while perched on the counter in her breathtaking *Architectural Digest* home; eating a picturesque pancake breakfast with her handsome, helpful husband (Marque Richardson), and her perfectly adorable and well-behaved child. Gabourey Sidibe and Lily Cowles play BFFs Dawn and Sarah respectively. A hilariously bubbly Girls' Night Out scene hints at an alternate universe of a more fun movie that could have been, and begs for a future comedic career for Sidibe. The less entertaining half includes predictably painful scenes of slavery, an attempt at a twist ending, and a final scene of comeuppance that could have been really badass if there had been any emotional investment in the characters. **—Sheri Flanders** *105 min. In wide release on VOD*

The Broken Hearts Gallery

RR *The Babysitter: Killer Queen*

The Babysitter: Killer Queen doesn't miss a beat. Picking up two years after *The Babysitter*, the sequel quickly reminds viewers that Cole (Judah Lewis) was able to defeat a satanic cult led by his babysitter Bee (Samara Weaving). Now, a high school junior, he's trying to forget his traumatic past and focus on his turbulent present. As a misfit, he struggles to make friends because no one believes his story, but also probably because he wears a brown corduroy three-piece suit to school. His loner status complicates things when his old enemies unexpectedly return, and it's once again all up to him to outsmart the forces of evil. Fortunately, an unsuspecting new student named Phoebe (Jenna Ortega), who is a force all her own, seems like a promising partner in crime. Full of scary situations and fun sequences, *The Babysitter: Killer Queen* is a horror-comedy that holds its own. **—Becca James** *102 min. Netflix*

RR *The Broken Hearts Gallery*

Check your hard feelings about cheesy romantic comedies at the door and just enjoy Natalie Krinsky's first feature film, *The Broken Hearts Gallery*. The film follows Lucy (Geraldine Viswanathan), who after being dumped by her boyfriend Max (Utkarsh Ambudkar) and fired from her job as a gallery assistant, meets aspiring hotelier Nick (Dacre Montgomery). Lucy goes on to create an exhibit in his work-in-progress hotel where emotional hoarders like her can leave items from previous relationships—and their emotional attachments to them—behind. It's refreshing to see a film with a woman of color as the lead without any plot points or dialogue revolving around her identity. And even when the film felt like it was pandering to a young audience with its pop culture references, the charming cast and the film's gusto surely solidifies *The Broken Hearts Gallery* as the newest entry in the endless list of feel-good romantic comedies. **—Marissa De La Cerda** *108 min. AMC theaters, Logan Theatre, Regal Webster Place*

The Devil All the Time

"Got time for a sinner?" It's a question Arvin Russell (Tom Holland) poses to a morally bankrupt preacher (Robert Pattinson) a little over halfway through *The Devil All the Time*. But it also seems to be the question that writer/director Antonio Campos repeatedly asks his audience throughout his wide-ranging, often bloated tribute to Southern Gothic literature and noir. What keeps the viewer tuned into the prolonged rigmarole that is *The Devil All the Time* are its stellar performances. Pattinson and Holland are both commanding, as are Riley Keough as an unconventional serial killer and Bill Skarsgård as Arvin's father. But the film often feels too uninspired and unfocused for its own good. There are instances of heart and significance scattered throughout the film, but it too often gives into its wandering nature and stops itself from ever making a lasting impression. **—Cody Corrall** *138 min. Netflix*

RR *Our Time Machine*

In this Chinese documentary by directors Yang Sun and S. Leo Chiang, artist Maleonn grapples with his own art making while also coming to terms with the legacy of his father, a renowned Chinese opera director, whose memory is slipping away due to Alzheimer's disease. Together, the father and son collaborate on a puppet show about a man who builds a time machine to take his elderly father back to his childhood. Frenetic sequences depicting Maleonn expertly crafting his steampunk puppets are interspersed with slower moments of reckoning among loved ones, making for a rarified, fragile emotional tenor, oscillating between professional awe of an artist at work, and the precursor of grief felt by a son losing his father. Gorgeously shot, each frame is precise in its intense focus on the twinned processes of creativity and familial connection. In Chinese with subtitles. **—Nina Li Coomes** *81 min. Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa*

RR *Rent-A-Pal*

Rent-A-Pal is a pre-Internet era look at the terrifying depths of isolation. Set in 1990, the film follows a lonely bachelor named David (Brian Landis Folkins) as he searches for love via a video dating service. A stereotypical nerd, David lives with his mother, Lucille (Kathleen Brady), providing for her as her dementia progresses. He uses this to his advantage in his dating profile, framing himself as a dutiful caregiver. David does not, however, land a date instantly. Instead, he discovers a strange VHS tape called *Rent-A-Pal*. Hosted by Andy (Wil Wheaton), the tape offers David a much-needed outlet, but it doesn't take long for the relationship to become worrisome. A depressing sense of desperation and delusion permeates the movie, leaving an icky sheen over even the most promising moments, such as David matching with a woman named Lisa (Amy Rutledge), as each uncomfortable scene builds to an almost unbearable conclusion. **—Becca James** *108 min. Music Box Theatre*

RR *Residue*

Aspiring filmmaker Jay (Obinna Nwachukwu) returns to his hometown of Washington, D.C., to write a film about his childhood, but nothing seems to be the same as when he left it. His neighborhood is gentrified beyond repair, his childhood friend is missing, and the rest of his relationships appear to have soured over time. With *Residue*, writer/director Merawi Gerima—the son of Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima—creates a haunting environment of isolation and unfamiliarity. With a distinct visual style, Gerima's daring debut illustrates the challenges of reconciling with your past in a deeply altered present—when home is a place you no longer recognize. Gerima gives these familiar themes new life through *Residue*'s disorienting cinematography, switching from film to kaleidoscopic digital in a stunning array that gives depth to Jay's internal and external battles. **—Cody Corrall** *90 min. Netflix*

Femdot, aka Femi Adigun, coordinates volunteers in the Aldi parking lot at 2600 N. Clybourn. Below: The Scholars Slide By volunteer Korrina Zartler loads groceries for delivery. MATTHEW GILSON FOR CHICAGO READER

Femdot pauses his rap career

to help feed Chicago

Run through his nonprofit, Delacreme Scholars, the Scholars Slide By has delivered groceries to hundreds of people in need this summer.

By Leor Galil

When grieving, outraged crowds marched through downtown Chicago on Saturday, May 30, to protest the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, Chicago rapper Femdot was among them. And when Chicago cops began assaulting those protesters, he was among the targets—one or more officers struck him in the head with a baton. Even after a hospital trip to have his injury closed with staples, Femdot—born Femi Adigun—didn't shrink from the fight against systemic racism and police brutality. But he did let friends talk him out of heading right back into the streets—in part because a new front in his struggle against injustice and inequity opened the very next day. On Sunday, May 31, Chicago Public Schools responded to citywide unrest by announcing that it was suspending its free lunch program as of Monday.

The CPS announcement went out after 10 PM. Its free lunch program had already served more than 13 million meals since the start of the pandemic, so a lot of families were relying on it to feed their children—and CPS gave them almost no time to prepare for its absence. Several of Adigun's friends sprang into action in the early hours of Monday, June 1. Rapper and Young Chicago Authors teaching artist Matt Muse posted online that he was headed to meet volunteers who were setting up rapid-response food distribution outside Burke Elementary School in Washington Park, which was ordinarily a pickup point for free CPS lunches.

Adigun read that post and reached out. "He saw it and called me instantly," Muse says. "He was like, 'Hey, do y'all need help with anything? I'll pull up.' I don't know if I told him to bring anything—I was probably like, 'Bro, just go to the store and get whatever is on the list that they put up.' He pulled up with donations—and then stuck around that first day, and helped with the volunteering and helped coordinate."

Adigun returned to Burke the following day to help with what would become the People's Grab-N-Go, a Black-led food distribution program that continued every Monday till the end of August. By midweek, Muse became part of the Grab-N-Go leadership team, which also included fellow YCA teaching artist Dominique James, activist Trina Reynolds-Tyler of Black Youth Project 100 (among other organizations), and Jihad Kheperu, a regional manager for youth outreach program Becoming a Man. On Tuesday, when Adigun left Burke after a second day of giving out food, he got an idea for a different way to provide for those in need.

"What about people who can't get there? The elderly, or people who are scared of COVID, things of that sort," he says. "And also, when I was driving back, leaving the neighborhood, I didn't see a grocery store open. So the next day I started delivering groceries."

On Wednesday, June 3, Adigun began spreading the word about his plan via Twitter and Instagram: "If you need food we will slide on you with groceries! No questions asked." He encouraged people to reach him through Delacreme Scholars, a nonprofit he'd established in 2018 to provide financial assistance to Black and Brown college students. He decided to call his new food distribution program the Scholars Slide By.

"When we started in the beginning of June, I was doing everything myself—doing all the running around, deliveries," Adigun says. "I was mapping out a system. I did it five days a week for two weeks straight, and I did 100 deliveries a day. I was working out the kinks of the system of how I wanted to do it."

Adigun couldn't keep up that pace for long, and by the end of June he'd created a process that's enabled him to coordinate a team of 25 to 50 volunteers to deliver groceries to as many as 100 homes per day. The Scholars Slide By settled into a biweekly schedule on June 27, operating on Saturday and Sunday every other week, and it's continued all summer. By the middle of August, Adigun and his volunteers had delivered groceries and other essentials to roughly half of Chicago's 77 community areas as well as to a few suburbs, including Cicero and Riverdale.

He's decided to wind down the program this month, in order to shift focus to the scholarships that Delacreme Scholars awards each winter. The final Slide By of the year will take place Saturday, September 26, and Sunday, September 27—though with any luck it'll be back. Adigun says he'd love to pick the Slide By back up next summer, if he's able to get funding.

The biweekly schedule of the Scholars Slide By has allowed Adigun to continue volunteering with other food distribution efforts, including the People's Grab-N-Go and Feed the West Side, a monthly initiative based in Austin that's overseen by the Pivot Gang-affiliated John Walt Foundation. He's stayed busy enough with community service this summer that he nearly forgot about a big booking that COVID-19 had canceled for him. "I was out doing something and I realized, like, 'Damn, I was supposed to be doing Pitchfork today,'" he says. "That would've been cool."

As Femdot (which he styles femdot.), Adigun is one of the strongest young MCs to emerge from Chicago in the past few years. He can deliver richly detailed verses at such a blistering speed that you could be convinced his first gear is most other rappers' fifth. He's worked hard to develop mike skills that can turn heads, and he's smart enough to put that technical flash to use in the service of storytelling and lyricism. Though his wordy, labor-intensive approach to rapping befits the underground, he's also got an ear for hooks and melodies with mainstream appeal.

And Adigun's career is picking up traction. In 2018, the year he graduated from DePaul, he performed at Lollapalooza. Last fall, he went on his first nationwide tour, supporting popular Chicago rapper Tobi Lou; all 24 dates sold out. While on the road, Adigun self-released his best project yet, *94 Camry Music*, a concept EP revolving around his first car. Had things gone according to plan, he would've performed it in full at the Pitchfork Music Festival.

Instead Adigun spent the summer driving around the city to bring strangers groceries. The city's punitive response to May's street demonstrations and looting—cutting off CTA service, raising bridges in the Loop, suspending the CPS free meal program—aggravated the inequalities and injustices that had brought protesters downtown in the first place. The Slide By can't undo the harm done by decades of disinvestment in Black and Brown communities, but it's provided much-needed relief by mitigating the lack of access to food for hundreds of Chicagoans.

"It's cool to know that when the world fails us, we'll take care of ourselves," Adigun says. "For everyone to be figuring it out together, it gives me a sense of peace in the midst of all this. A lot of times when we're doing this, stuff is stressful, but those end up being some of the best days."

Delacreme Scholars had its beginnings several years before its launch in 2018. Adigun, 25, struggled with the financial

Adigun (right) with the Scholars Slide By volunteers Fallone Moffett, Corea Mitchell, and Staci Morris MATTHEW GILSON FOR CHICAGO READER

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burden of higher education while at DePaul. "I had holds on my account a lot. I had to put money down to schedule classes," he says. "In college, in general, you watch people who don't come back after the first semester, or the next year, and it's over funds." In 2013 or 2014—around the time he began college—he got the idea to offer scholarships to fellow students, but he wouldn't have the means to do it till after he graduated.

Adigun got by with a lot of loans, which he'll be paying off for a long while yet. He also figured out how to navigate a byzantine, opaque administrative network in order to find resources for students in need. "It's like a secret . . . not *society,* but you've gotta tunnel through, talk to the right person, meet in person, do this, do that—somebody could probably help you get an extra grant or something," he says. "It's a whole process."

His schedule at DePaul didn't leave him a lot of uncommitted time to spend jumping through these hoops. He majored in biological sciences and worked a part-time job, all while he laid the groundwork for his rise as a rapper. "I'd be in class from, like, nine to two; I would probably be in lab from three to six; I worked from six to 11; I'd record from 11 to, like, seven," Adigun says. "In between those times I'd probably just be in the library. I'm known for being in the library." That's not all he was known for. "I didn't sleep," he says. "I could fall asleep standing up, because you gotta get what you can."

Adigun's rap career gained momentum steadily throughout his college years, despite this grueling routine. The difficulty of making time for music taught him to budget every minute and sharpened his perfectionist streak. He performed his first public set as part of a show sponsored by Columbia College at Subterranean in 2014, then landed his first headlining gig at Schubas in May 2017. In June 2018, just days after dropping the album *Delacreme 2* (distributed by beloved Chicago hip-hop indie label Closed Sessions), he graduated from DePaul. That summer he appeared at Lollapalooza, and for his next big show he headlined Lincoln Hall in December. As he prepared for that date, he revisited his idea to start a scholarship.

"I'm like, 'I could just take the proceeds from this show and give this away to the people at DePaul, and if it works I can continue to grow and do this next year with people outside of DePaul,'" Adigun says. "I'm fresh out of college—I know what people in college need, because I graduated four months ago."

Adigun announced his scholarship program with a tweet on November 5, 2018. He asked Black DePaul students who needed financial assistance to e-mail their name, age, and major to an address he'd set up for Delacreme Scholars—named after his album. "I'm trying to make it in a way where I'm funneling my resources, but it's also not about me," he says. "The scholarship is a completely separate entity from Femdot. It just so happens that I'm the one who made it."

He's since secured partnerships that have allowed him to grow Delacreme Scholars, and because he's no longer relying solely on his personal income, he can offer a predetermined amount rather than just giving away however much his next big show makes. Adigun's Lincoln Hall concert funded two scholarships, but in late 2019 the next annual crop of scholars grew to six with help from Puma—and the Illinois and Indiana students Adigun selected to become Delacreme Scholars didn't just get $750 each but also Puma clothes, shoes, and backpacks.

Adigun didn't decide to award scholarships in the dead of winter just because that's when his Lincoln Hall show happened—he was also thinking about the way financial aid, which is typically granted at the beginning of the school year, semester, or quarter, often runs dry right around then. "There's no scholarships in the middle of the year—that's when your financial aid drops, or you've got to wait for it to kick in when you get back to school but you have holds now, or you're trying to figure out your whole semester and you need money for rent but you're waiting for your refund check to hit on time," he explains. "I just wanted to be the resource I didn't have. I'm like, 'I would've loved to trip and fall into some money in December.'"

Adigun's mother, Siki, didn't know her son was even interested in rapping until 2012, when he won a competition at Homewood-Flossmoor High School at age 16. Siki considered her eldest son, Kola, who's 12 years Adigun's senior, to be the MC of the house. When Kola made music in the basement of the family home, Adigun would watch him work. "Femi, we knew he was listening—but nobody knew he had that interest until high school," Siki says.

"We've always supported him, but I never thought he would ever go into this," she says of Adigun's hip-hop career. "I just wanted to support whatever he's doing, and just be there for him, just make him happy. The only problem that he would not get my support is if school is not going well. But if school's going well, anything else you want to do, you got my support."

School wasn't a problem for Adigun. He was an honor roll student in high school, and he also played on the basketball team and ran track. As the Homewood-Flossmoor 2013 class president, he gave a speech at his graduation. "If I remember correctly, a lot of it was rooted in moments that we had as a class—like beating our rival high school. That's what success was like," he says. "I think that's how I ended it—like, 'This is gonna be a snippet of what success is yet to come.'"

Since his early days at DePaul, Adigun has defined success for himself as succeeding in music. "I pretty much geared my school and work schedule around me being a musician, rather than gearing my work and music around being in school," he says. "I was always moving around. I was always tired."

Adigun is a meticulous planner, which helped him maximize the time he spent on music. He'd often record raps on his own at home, polishing his lines till he knew he could deliver them perfectly in a professional studio—he wanted to be able to nail his tracks in one take when the meter was running. "Because of funding, I literally can't afford to waste time, but I also don't have time to waste because I have to study," he says.

The disciplined work habits he developed in college have stuck with him. "A lot of my creative process—even currently—is purely based on me being in school and having to have a structure," he says. While at DePaul in 2014, he planned out a timetable of mixtape, EP, and album releases that extended well beyond graduation. "All the projects I've dropped up to this point since the *King Dilla* project, I've known what these projects have been since 2014."

At DePaul, Adigun shared a class with Cole Bennett, founder of hip-hop blog Lyrical Lemonade, which has since become a miniature entertainment empire largely thanks to Bennett's videography work. In 2016, when Bennett shot a video for Adigun's "King Dilla Freestyle," he brought Lyrical Lemonade editor Elliot Montanez with him.

"Afterwards, Cole was like, 'I really like this guy. He's super dope, he's talented—I think he could use some help, like a manager,'" Montanez remembers. "Cole was basically like, 'I would, but I don't really have time. If you'd be interested, that's something you should look into.' And I was already interested." Montanez says he spent about a year becoming friends with Adigun before he formally asked to become his manager. "I always wanted to manage someone," Montanez says. "But I wanted it to be the right person."

Montanez manages Adigun, sharing the job with Tamika Ponce, who met the rapper through a mutual friend. Adigun asked Ponce to manage him a few times before she warmed up to the idea and came aboard in 2017.

"I knew I was in trouble because he got booked for a House of Vans show at South by Southwest, and I asked who was going with him and he was like, 'I'm going by myself,'" Ponce says. "I was like, 'Yeah, I can't let you do that.' I booked all my stuff last-minute, and it was really expensive to go down there and help him." After she pitched in to set up his first headlining show that May, she agreed to join Montanez in managing Adigun.

"When she got brought on, she helped so much—she makes our lives easier," Montanez says. "We're a good trio. I feel like we work well together."

Like Montanez, Ponce has a relationship with Adigun that transcends business. "He took me and Elliot home to meet his mother, and I felt like I was meeting my boyfriend's parents or something. I brought her flowers. I was nervous," she says. "We're friends—I mean, we have to be. We trust each other with a lot of stuff."

Montanez and Ponce have helped Adigun with the Scholars Slide By all summer. On the second day of the People's Grab-N-Go, Ponce and Adigun brought a large canopy that organizers used for shade throughout the summer. When Ponce noticed Adigun using his own funds on the Slide By, she stepped in to remind him that he had to budget carefully and solicit donations because there weren't any gigs on the horizon. "Of course, as the manager, I'm like, 'We got to get a little bit more organized, because you're also spending all your own money and everything's slow right now,'" she says.

In his early social-media calls for volunteers and support for the Slide By, Adigun included information for Delacreme Scholars' Cash App, QuickPay, and Zelle accounts. By July, he'd launched a BioTapper website where people can donate money via Cash App, credit card, or debit card as well as sign up to volunteer. The Delacreme Scholars website has added a form to take grocery requests, which closes once it's accepted as many submissions as the Slide By can handle—thus ensuring that nobody goes through the trouble of listing the groceries they need and then doesn't receive anything. "We really get whatever they ask for—the 'no questions asked' is a real thing," Adigun says. "I mean, we don't get alcohol and stuff like that, but in terms of food and baby care products . . . a lot of people need cleaning stuff, so we'll grab mops—whatever they really need, we'll grab it."

Adigun's system involves up to 50 volunteers per day, split evenly across two shifts—the first shift runs from 11 AM to 2 PM, the second from 2 to 5 PM. He meets volunteers at a north-side parking lot adjacent to an Aldi and Jewel-Osco, then provides each of them with grocery lists for two households. Ponce and Montanez station themselves inside Aldi and Jewel, respectively, and use Delacreme Scholars' credit cards to process grocery payments for the other volunteers.

"Fem will set up in the back of his car, in a parking lot with his laptop," Montanez says. "He organizes all this stuff himself. He has spreadsheets. He's in constant communication with these families that are reaching out."

When volunteers cancel at the last minute, Adigun, Montanez, and Ponce pick up those grocery deliveries themselves. Adigun is grateful to be reminded of how rewarding it is to hand over a donation in person. "When you pull up and they start realizing, 'Oh, y'all got what I asked for,' it's cool, it's an element of care in that," he says. "Like, 'OK, y'all actually are considerate and care about what I have going on enough to get me my essential items that I asked for.' It gets heavy, but stuff like that, you can't buy that. You can't buy that at all."

As the Slide By became an established part of his summer, Adigun also continued volunteering with the People's Grab-N-Go and Feed the West Side, launched by John Walt Foundation executive director Nachelle Pugh, Pivot Gang cofounder Frsh Waters, and photographer Qurissy Lopez. Leaders from all three of these mutual aid efforts consistently pitched in on at least one of the others, which helped them all grow.

"We all care about the city, number one," Muse says. "We all care about each other, number two—we already exist with each other in community, long before all of this happened. So it's very easy to be like, 'Yo, Imma pull up to your shit, you gonna pull up to my shit, we're all gonna help each other out.' That's how it's been since June first. Everybody's been helping everybody, there's never a no, there's never a 'Nah, I'm not in the mood.' It's 'Oh, you need help? Imma pull up.' That's the energy Femdot brought. That's the energy we brought to Femdot's shit. That's the energy we brought to Feed the West Side."

Pugh has made sure that people who've come to Feed the West Side were aware of the Scholars Slide By—it's been the only program of the three to do deliveries. "We had a sign-up sheet for people that were in line, like, 'Hey, if you want other assistance or have a friend or family member that's immobile or can't get out here today, we do have a friend that's doing grocery drop-offs,'" she says. "I can't even tell you how many people that I know of that have reached out and asked, 'Hey, could you submit my information to that group again? Because they were really helpful for me.'"

Pugh understands the work that goes into coordinating a food distribution program, and she admires Adigun's drive. "He was protesting, trying to stand up for the injustice that was happening in our community, and at the same time, still doing his grocery delivery," she says. "It just proves the type of young man that he is."

When Adigun has delivered groceries this summer, he's had to rent a car, use a rideshare app, or borrow a car from his parents. He said farewell to the vehicle at the center of his most recent release, the October 2019 EP *94 Camry Music*, on December 5, 2016, after he crashed into another car on his way to LA Van Gogh's headlining set at Subterranean. "My brakes were bad, I slid into somebody, dented my car, and parked it," Adigun says. "I did my verse, left, and that was the last time I had that car."

"He would just always tell me how that car was basically like a piece of his family," Montanez says. "His mom called the car Killa Cam." Adigun had been driving the green 1994 Toyota Camry since he was 16—it'd previously belonged to his older sister, Seun, a track star who also founded the Nigerian bobsled team in 2016.

Adigun got the idea for a concept EP about his car in 2015, but he didn't think he was ready to make what became *94 Camry Music* back then—in fact, the right time didn't arrive till after graduation, long after he'd abandoned Killa Cam. "The music I want to make now has to reflect me post-school and has to be honest to who I am," he says. "I'm like, 'OK, what moments have made me who I am—where did I have most of these moments? In my car.'"

Because Adigun didn't start working on *94 Camry Music* till the loss of his car was a couple years behind him, he was better able to render those memories in lucid, even-keeled verses. He delivers a career-making performance on "Snuck to Matty's," a minute-by-minute breakdown of an endless night out with friends that's upended by a shooting at a house party—his vivid lyrics unsentimentally capture the thrill and sadness of a life-altering night.

Adigun had been driving a 2002 Honda Accord while making *94 Camry Music*, but it gave out on him in May 2019, when he was en route to a mixing session at 2 AM. He never replaced that car—before the pandemic, he'd been doing his touring and traveling in rentals or other people's vehicles, and he'd adapted to getting around town without one of his own.

On Saturday, May 30, after the cops whaled on Adigun at the protest, he texted Ponce asking if he could swing by her place.

"I kind of knew something was wrong—and he showed up and he was just so calm," Ponce says. "Ten minutes later, he takes his hat off, and I see blood on his face. I'm like, 'What's going on?' He's like, 'Oh yeah, I got beat with a baton.'" Ponce stayed up all night with Adigun in case he had a concussion. He did, and when he finally went to the hospital, he needed those staples to close up the top of his head.

For years, Adigun had consistently scheduled time to write lyrics and work on music, but after his injury, he took a break. "You would think, like, 'Oh, this is something you should probably write about,' but I didn't," he says.

Adigun had been working on the Slide By and helping with other mutual aid efforts for around a month when he started flexing his music muscles again. By early July, he'd started participating in Zoom sessions with his friends in Pivot Gang—they'd set themselves a challenge to write 16-bar verses and produce beats in 16 minutes. "We're all so competitive, it felt like we was in the basement or we was just cooking up with the homies," he says. "That made me feel like I have it, like I can start writing again." At around the same time, he wrote his first new song since early May.

Before the pandemic, he'd finished recording most of the not-yet-titled follow-up to *94 Camry Music*. He's been tweaking it on and off, though he didn't touch it during his hiatus either. "The project that I'm working on now, I'm also really excited about that, 'cause it doesn't sound like *94 Camry Music* at all," he says. "It sounds like me, but it doesn't sound like *94 Camry Music*. Whatever people are expecting, they're wrong, and I'm pretty happy about that."

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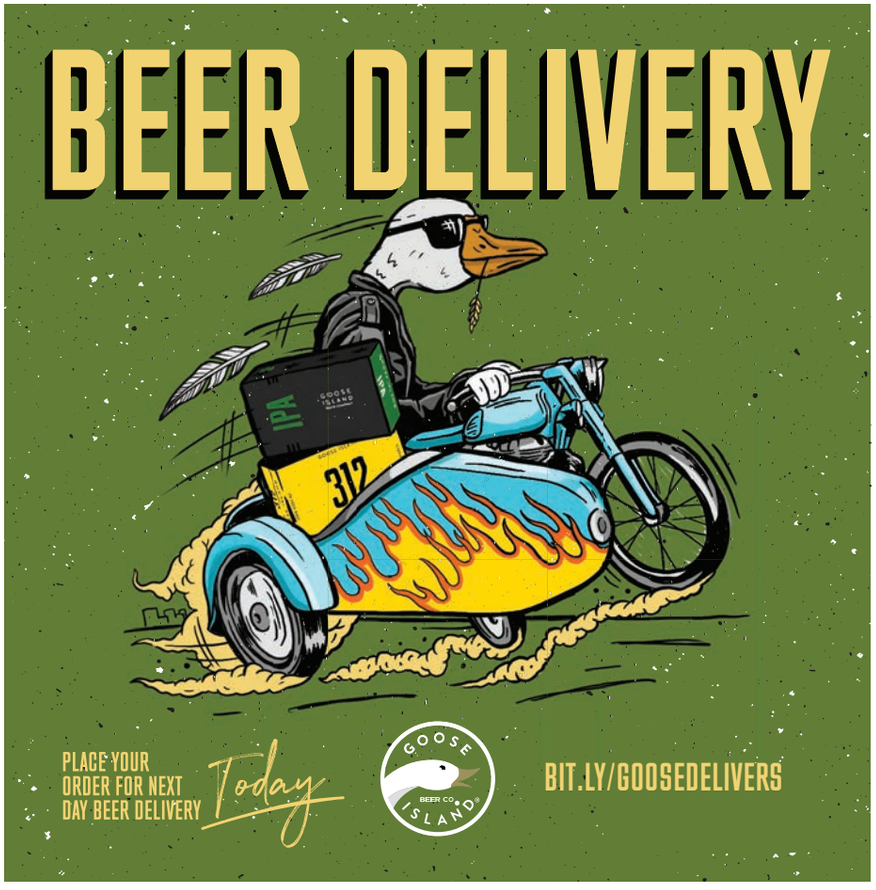

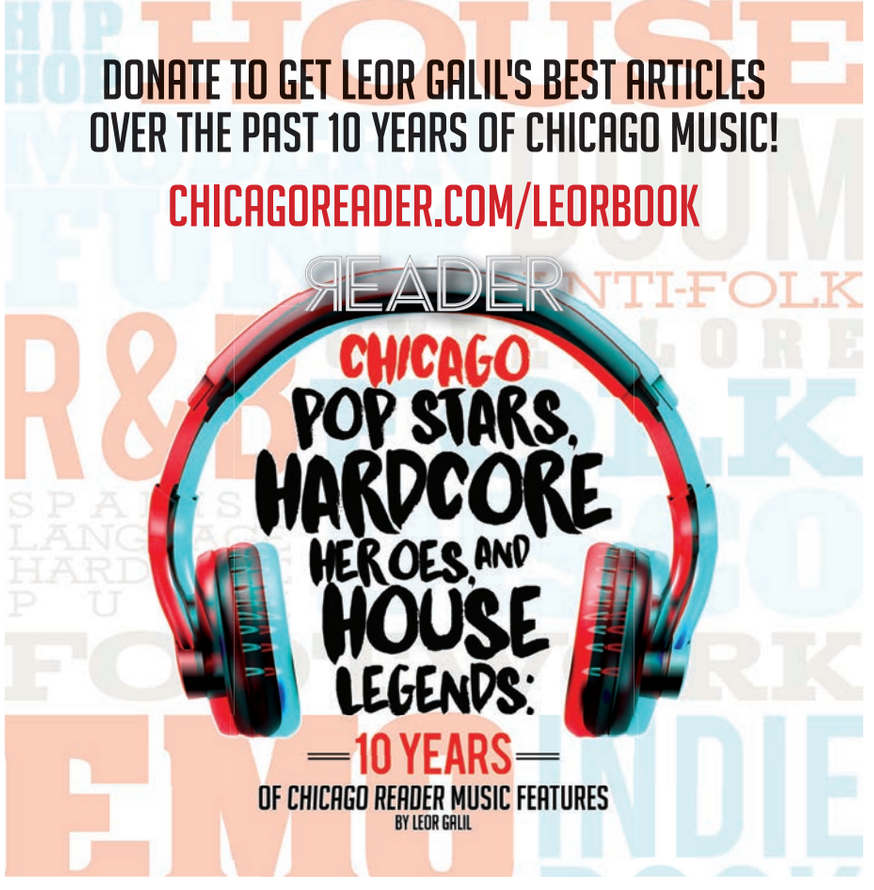

CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

Sandra Treviño, DJ and founder of Latin-music site Enchúfate

"I love that I can share the music that I love, and that once people hear it they're gonna love it too."

As told to Leor Galil

Sandra Treviño, 48, has run Latin-music site Enchúfate since founding it in 2005. She also contributes to Vocalo and two Lumpen Radio programs and DJs as part of Latinx arts collective Future Rootz.

I was born in Chicago, but we moved to Texas when I was ten, so I grew up there. When I came back, I met someone who introduced me to local shows. I started going to local rock en español shows. One of the bands, Descarga, I started following them a lot. One day the singer, Hector Ivan Garcia, came out of the show, and I was standing outside, and he was like, "Would you like to be a band manager?" That's where it all started for me, as far as covering music, being involved in music management, and booking shows and all that—that was in the early 2000s. I was with them for about 13 years.

I remember one of the first things they asked me to do was to cold-call someone that they knew and just ask if they could play. I was like, "I'm the band's manager—I want to

STEPHANIE MANRIQUEZ

know how this works." He was very nice and told me how they did the booking and how they paid out.

I realized that a lot of the bands weren't reaching out to venues that they didn't know because they thought the venues would automatically say, "Rock en español, that's not something we know, so no." I approached it like, "Why are you saying you're a rock en español band—you're just a rock band." And that's when I started to get bigger bookings. We did the first rock en español showcase at Double Door—I was so happy and so proud.

When we saw the lack of coverage for the rock en español community—nobody was reporting about it, we weren't getting written up—the band's singer and myself decided to do something about it. He studied cinematography at Columbia College and he's like, "I know how to do video. If you're interested in interviewing bands, why don't we cover the community?" We started a TV show on channel 25 called *Errores no Eliminados*, which means "Errors not Eliminated." We started covering local shows—going to every single show out there, interviewing all the bands. That's where my love for covering artists that weren't being covered comes from. Now that's what I do all the time as a music journalist.

The TV show was in 2002. We were on the air for about two years, and then we stopped. We wanted to do it again, and we came back with a bigger team—we had a dozen volunteers. We decided we were gonna do it in one location for a certain amount of time, so we would do a month at Cobra Lounge, a month at this other venue, and different venues; the bands would just show up, do their performance, then do the interview. So we did that for about a year. The local rock en español community wasn't interested in us doing that, so we just started adding bands that were outside of that specific genre. At some point, we were like, "People aren't really interested," so we stopped. But before that, I did start my website, Enchúfate.

I started it to cover music that I liked—music outside of rock en español, which is what we call Latin alternative. I liked it because it wasn't just the hard rock and metal that we were used to seeing at the Latin rock shows; there was stuff that was electronic, a little pop, just different fusions of music that I loved, but that wasn't accepted by the people that loved rock. That's why I started Enchúfate—to promote all these other amazing artists that were doing music that had a Latin background.

I kept doing it on Enchúfate, and then I started working with Gozamos, which is a Latin outlet for art and culture. Eventually Vocalo reached out. Jesse Menendez, who used to work there, reached out and said, "Would you be interested in coming in so we can interview you?"

After that, he asked me if I was interested in coming in to talk about Latin alternative music once a month or once every two weeks, and that's how my segment started on Vocalo. Now I have the privilege of doing the Friday-morning segment on Latin alternative music, and I've been doing that maybe seven years.

I got into radio through them. I started working with Radio One Chicago on WLUW—I was with them for a few years. And then Lumpen Radio happened. Me and my DJ partner, Stephanie Manriquez, we decided we wanted to push women-fronted music, mostly from Latin America and South America. We were asked to DJ at a show, and then when Lumpen Radio popped up, we submitted our show idea; we called ourselves the Ponderers, because we were always pondering about music.

Now I work with Future Rootz. I'm part of their DJ crew—I'm also a DJ. I started DJing because when we would go to clubs or venues and it was supposed to be a Latin night, they would play the same thing all the time. It got to the point where we would get to the show, and we were like, "OK, he's gonna play this next, this is next, and now this is next." And sure enough, that's the way it was. Again, it was the singer of Descarga who was like, "Why don't you start bringing your CDs and playing when we have a show?" And that's how it started, and I've expanded to vinyl, which is great.

I love that I can share the music that I love, and that once people hear it they're gonna love it too. But my love isn't just rock en español—Latin alternative music, tropical music, some global bass here and there. Cumbia is my favorite. I have the Future Rootz radio show as well, on Lumpen. And I write with whoever wants me to write for them about Latin alternative music, mostly because that's my favorite thing to write about.

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MUSIC

PICK OF THE WEEK

Bill Callahan has a couple dad jokes for you

OTO GILLEN

BILL CALLAHAN, *GOLD RECORD*
Drag City
billcallahan.bandcamp.com/album/gold-record

IN 2019 BILL CALLAHAN broke a bout of writer's block that had lasted more than five years with *Shepherd in a Sheepskin Vest*, a 20-song concept record about the satisfactions of family life. *Gold Record*, which arrives just 14 months later, sustains its predecessor's sparse country-rock sound. And while it wastes no effort on trying to shape its ten songs into a cohesive statement, several tracks elaborate upon *Shepherd*'s themes. Having embraced fatherhood on *Shepherd*, Callahan now revels in daddishness by dispensing advice, telling jokes, and laying down rules. The limo-driving narrator of "Pigeons" preaches tolerance to a pair of newlyweds. "Ry Cooder" is an escalating tall tale about the titular guitarist's slick licks and yoga skills. And on "Protest Song," he upbraids a singer on late-night TV who is "messing with a man's toys," with the tone of a cranky pop who won't let you touch the contents of his toolbox but sure will let you know if you don't hold your hammer right. If Callahan is concerned about staying at the top of his game, he doesn't show it. And the way he layers intimations of past and future losses into "The Mackenzies," which describes a friendly encounter between an elderly couple and their agoraphobic neighbor, proves he has nothing to worry about. —**BILL MEYER**

BIG BRANCH, *CLIFF*
Press Pot
bigbranch.bandcamp.com

On their debut album, *Cliff*, Chicago duo Big Branch combine warm vocal melodies with kitchen-sink instrumentals inspired by the dusty samples of underground rap. The record's ramshackle sound recalls Beck circa "Loser" or Dubya-era TV on the Radio, a hybrid style the group calls "hop 'n' roll." Vocalist Jamal Semaan and guitarist and producer Rob Lorts originally went by the name Grimms & Blacknight, and they wrote the songs on *Cliff* during a 2016 DIY tour. After coming home to financial hardship and health problems, they revitalized themselves with a new band name and a more guitar-heavy sound. Big Branch recorded *Cliff* with producer Brian Deck, who also contributes percussion—it shares the foreground with Lorts's guitar playing, such as the wiry lines that supplement the chorus on "Something Out There." Semaan's conversational vocals sound great paired with harmonies from Ohmme's Macie Stewart, who guests on a couple tracks on vocals and violin—they're especially good together on lead single "Spit It Out," where the singers plead for more direct communication even as they prepare to wince at the unfiltered truth. But the front man hasn't abandoned rap. Midway through "Bubblegum," Semaan drops into an unexpected rhythmic pocket amid a cacophony of overlapping guitars and cymbals. The song doesn't employ traditional drum-kit patterns—instead Semaan's voice provides the rhythmic bedrock, anchoring the layers of instrumentation. It's a sophisticated gambit that was worth all of the time Big Branch spent in flux. —**JACK RIEDY**

JUJU EXCHANGE, *THE ETERNAL BOOMBOX*
Self-released
thejujuexchange.bandcamp.com/album/the-eternal-boombox

In a recent interview with the Yale Center for Faith & Culture's podcast *For the Life of the World*, pianist Julian Reid described the way mourning informed the thematic underpinnings of *The Eternal Boombox*, a new self-released EP by his Chicago-based band, the JuJu Exchange. The members of this jazz combo also draw upon their experiences outside jazz: Reid is assistant music director for Kelley Chapel United Methodist Church in Decatur, Georgia; his drummer brother, Everett, studied jazz and performing arts technology at the University of Michigan; and producer and trumpeter Nico Segal is a crucial member of Chance the Rapper's band, the Social Experiment. Each of the five songs on *The Eternal Boombox* corresponds with a stage of grief from the Kübler-Ross model: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The second track, "Avalanche," is definitely the "anger" track, with ice-sheet synth melodies and a rush of crunching electronic percussion fit for drum 'n' bass. As Reid told *For the Life of the World*, "Music cultivates in me—and cultivates in my colleagues—a sensibility of having a sense of self and being connected to a greater whole." That sensibility guides the JuJu Exchange as they blend genres throughout *The Eternal Boombox*, and it propels them through the darkest shades of grief. On the fourth track, "And So

Le Couleur GABRIELLE DEMERS

On . . . ," they evoke depression with a small symphony, and Reid's flamboyant gospel-flecked piano pierces a despondent string passage like a sunbeam cutting through fog. —**Leor Galil**

LE COULEUR, *CONCORDE*
Lisbon Lux
lisbonluxrecords.com/le-couleur-d

Montreal synth-pop trio Le Couleur delve into some disturbing history on their new album, *Concorde*, named for the supersonic airliner that in the 1970s made it possible for elite jet-setters to leave their European estates and arrive at Manhattan nightclubs after as little as three hours in the air. Midway through the record's title track, the group deliver a gut-punching reminder of the great stain on the Concorde's legacy: a fuel-tank explosion on a 2000 Air France flight that left no survivors. (The plane was retired from service in 2003.) As singer and keyboardist Laurence Giroux-Do told online magazine Âught last month, the album concept was inspired by all the ups and the downs of the Concorde's story: "We were fascinated by the Concorde: its symbolism, its sexy look, its crash." Drummer Steeven Chouinard and bassist Patrick Gosselin add soft but precise nu-disco beats to the album's sophisticated, sometimes dreamy dance pop, and their tight interplay works magically on "Train de Minuit" (which could easily be confused for a Giorgio Moroder classic) and the instrumental "Vol d'Après-midi." Giroux-Do accompanies the swanky grooves with sad, introspective lyrics suffused with memories of love lost, sung entirely in French—like the Concorde, Le Couleur evoke a posh and perfect moment in time. —**Salem Collo-Julin**

PHEW, *VERTICAL KO*
Disciples
phewjapan.bandcamp.com/album/vertigo-ko

For more than four decades, Hiromi Moritani has been making music by her own rules. She's largely known for the short-lived art-rock band Aunt Sally, which she started as a teenager in late-70s Osaka, and for her 1981 self-titled solo album under the name Phew. Since then she's continually honed her craft as Phew, expanding beyond her post-punk beginnings into straight-ahead rock, otherworldly pop songs, and avant-garde experimental pieces built around her voice. Though she's collaborated with a handful of artists throughout the decades, including Bill Laswell, the Raincoats' Ana da Silva, and turntable experimentalist Otomo Yoshihide, her solo endeavors have consistently been her most enthralling and intriguing. With the new *Vertical KO* (Disciples), Phew skews darker, presenting a collection of seven harrowing synth-and-voice tracks that Moritani says comes with an underlying message: "What a terrible world we live in, but let's survive." That simultaneous sense of dread and persistence is clear on album opener "The Very Ears of Morning," whose diaphanous ambience flutters gracefully before tumbling into alien noises. The peculiar uneasiness of that song is magnified on "Let's Dance Let's Go," an enveloping whirlwind of disorienting manipulated vocals that, contrary to its title, is the least danceable track on the album. On Moritani's cover of the Raincoats' "The Void," she stiffens the jaggedness of the original with a humming drone, while a constant tumbling drum-machine beat lends it an anxious jitter. Most potent is "All That Vertigo," which starts off subtle but eventually wraps the listener in whirring sirens, haunting vocal coos, and a suffocating wall of noise that feels like being hit with a huge

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MUSIC

Uniform EBRU YILDIZ

continued from 37

gust of wind. *Vertical KO* is a visceral and evocative listen: you come out of it feeling worn out and beaten. But the album also lives up to Moritani's message—once you make it through with your emotions intact, the world seems a bit less daunting. **—Joshua Minsoo Kim**

UNIFORM, *SHAME*
Sacred Bones
unifuckingform.bandcamp.com/album/shame

I've spent a lot of *Reader* ink gushing about Uniform and the previous projects of their members. With the release of their new fourth full-length, *Shame*, the band's sonic assault continues—and so does my adoration. Formed in 2014 as a wildly abrasive industrial-noise-rock-drone duo of vocalist Michael Berdan (formerly of unreal noise-core trio Drunkdriver) and guitarist Ben Greenberg (who's played in Zs and Pygmy Shrews and engineered records by every good band coming out of NYC), Uniform have continually streamlined their sound, toying with Wax Trax! industrial, straightforward punk, and electronic synth swaths—sometimes all at once. On 2018's *The Long Walk*, they added live drums to their previously all-electronic rhythm section, recording with experimental drummer Greg Fox (Liturgy, Guardian Alien). The result was driving, aggressive, blown-out noisy punk and metal—no frills, no bullshit. It was a perfect album, as far as I was concerned, and captured everything I needed from a weird, heavy band: sticky riffs, deranged vocals, and a grimy, gloomy atmosphere. Turns out Uniform had the capacity to improve on perfection. Fox has left, and longtime touring drummer Mike Sharp (an Austin scene mainstay who's played with the Impalers, Bad Faith, and Hatred Surge) has stepped in, and his heavy hand anchors *Shame*'s creeping, pounding tracks. The album walks the line between organic and synthetic, mean and sad, pretty and terrifying, familiar and foreign. The songs are layered and textured, and they're all delivered with brilliant, confrontational fury. Uniform have always stirred up a lot of emotions, and *Shame* makes you feel everything at once with uneasy, eerie clarity. It's the band's best work yet, a massive statement in darkness and a well-timed soundtrack for our frustratingly twisted age. **—Luca Cimarusti**

VIC SPENCER, *SPENCER FOR HIGHER 3*
Old Fart Luggage
vicspencer.bandcamp.com/album/spencer-for-higher-3

Chicago rapper Vic Spencer couldn't let the year pass without dropping at least a couple albums. August's *Spencer for Higher 3* (Old Fart Luggage) is his third solo outing of 2020, and that's not even all he's put out. After February's *Psychological Cheat Sheet* and April's *No Shawn Skemps*, he released June's *Your Birthday's Cancelled* as part of Iron Wigs, an underground supergroup that also features Chicago rapper Verbal Kent and UK rapper-producer Sonny Sathi, better known as SonnyJim. Sathi produced the bulk of *Spencer for Higher 3*, and his elegant old-school soul approach to boom-bap brings out the musicality in Spencer's gritty voice. Spencer can come off as irascible, but on this album he's most often self-deprecating and playfully mischievous—he occasionally uses his ad-libbed grunts as an exclamation mark at the end of a jocular line. Spencer's a workaholic, but throughout *Spencer for Higher 3* he sounds like he's unlocked the secret to having more fun on the clock than anybody else. **—Leor Galil**

VUELVETELOCA, *CONTRA*
Self-released
vuelveteloca.bandcamp.com

American news media can be frustratingly myopic. But even when mainstream reporting fails to deliver the goods from outside our bubble, the simple act of listening to an album can remind us that we're part of a global community of people

Jay Wood COURTESY THE ARTIST

who share more common interests—and face more common threats—than our leaders would have us believe. On *Contra*, the new seventh album from Chilean four-piece Vuelveteloca, the band use a spacey blend of psych, Krautrock, and postrock to tap into dystopian visions of the future and a beautiful spirit of resistance and reemergence. The record's title means "against" or "opposed," and its six brightly colored songs conjure feelings of warmth and movement, even when their moods turn mysterious and their themes—such as on the hypnotic "La Sangre del Oro" ("The Blood of Gold")—hint at something darker. The single "Ciudades Subterráneas" ("Underground Cities") was inspired by a visit to Cappadocia in Turkey, where for centuries networks of hidden caves and tunnels protected citizens from persecution and invading armies. Over ebbing and flowing desert-rock riffs, chunky metallic chords, and hazy grooves, the band draw threads from that history to the present day, when people around the world, Chileans included, are rising against oppression. But even those currently at the top of the pecking order could be at the mercy of some unknown forces pulling the strings: on the meandering closing track, "Puentes Etéreos" ("Ethereal Bridges"), Vuelveteloca explore the concept of otherworldly beings that anonymously bend mankind to their will. That might sound scary at the outset, but as the band glide through smoky clouds of percussion into a motorik rhythm, their blend of triumphant, silky guitars and soaring atmospheres suggests that everything could turn out all right. **—Jamie Ludwig**

JAY WOOD, *TRACKSTAR*
Freesole
jaywood.bandcamp.com/album/trackstar

Three years ago Chicago rapper Jay Wood (a member of the Freesole collective) dropped his debut full-length, *Self Doubt*, where he made mincemeat of hard-edged beats while sharing the mike with more established MCs, including Ajani Jones and Femdot. Since then Wood has polished his skills and reconciled his fierce vocals with his interest in pop songwriting. On his new EP, *Trackstar* (Freesole), he matches the ironclad mettle of his toughest instrumentals and harshest drums with boisterous performances that tease out the sweetness hidden in the tracks—on "Champagne" he rounds off his rapid raps with a light, honeyed touch. Producers Namesake and Moses Mode also have an ear for glossy pop, which comes through most prominently on the title track—Wood matches the music's ostentatious R&B vibes with gold-flaked singing that's sensuous enough to make Travis Scott blush. **—Leor Galil**

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Algoritmo 9/24, 7 PM, Fitz-Gerald's, Berwyn FREE

Ali & Ben 10/3, 3 PM, Reggies' Roof Deck FREE

Kris Allen 10/8, 8 PM, livestream at citywinery.com ALL

A.M. Drinkers 10/11, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Devendra Banhart, Todd Dahlhoff 9/30, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Christy Bennett's Fumée Jazz 9/30, 6:30 PM, Colvin House ALL

Bluefecta featuring Toronzo Cannon, Sandra Antongiorgi, Browns Crew, SistaStrings, Jon Langford & Jean Cook, DJ Dripsweat, Harvey Dreaver, B. Keyz, DEATH, Jaefkae, Avery R. Young, Ric Wilson 9/17, 7 PM, online fundraiser for Detroit Action, Leaders Igniting Transformation, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, and Voces de la Frontera action; livestream link provided after registration FREE ALL

JC Brooks 10/24, 8 PM, City Winery ALL

Bumpus 9/26, 7 PM, Fitz-Gerald's, Berwyn FREE

Cannonball 9/25, 7 PM, Fitz-Gerald's, Berwyn FREE

Paul Cebar 10/18, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Eric Chial 10/12, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Chicago Honky Tonk DJs 9/27, 3 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE

Chicago Urban Pride Finale celebration featuring DJ Superman, DJ Dot, and more 6/27/2021, 10 PM, the Promontory

Claudettes 10/10, 5 and 8:30 PM, City Winery ALL

Michael Steven Cohen 9/20, 2 PM; 9/27, 2 PM, Montrose Saloon

Bernard Crump and friends 10/2, 6:30 and 9:30 PM, the Promontory

Dehd record release for *Flower of Devotion* 10/15, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv ALL

A Different Vibe featuring DJ Machede, DJ Joe Kollege 9/24, 5 PM, the Promontory

Rachel Drew Quartet 9/27, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Dry County Line 9/19, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

End of Summer Soiree hosted by Ramonski Luv featuring Damon Williams, Carmichael Musiclover, DJ Sam Chatman, DJ Cisco 9/19, 6:30 PM, The Entrance, Harvey

FitzGerald's Drive-In Concert featuring Michael McDermott 9/26, 4 and 8 PM, Reuse Depot, Maywood, 8 PM is sold out ALL

Harold Green & Flowers for the Living 10/16, 7:15 PM, the Promontory ALL

Hardly Strictly Bluegrass 2020 featuring Alison Brown, Yola, John Doe, Aaron Lee Tasjan, Sierra Ferrell, Emmylou Harris, Buddy Miller, Amythyst Kiah, War & Treaty, Steve Earle & the Halfgrass Dukes, Chuck Prophet, and more 10/2-10/4, noon, livestream at hardlystrictlybluegrass.com FREE ALL

Anne Harris & Ernie Hendrickson 10/4, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Honey Cellar 9/20, 7 PM, Montrose Saloon

Jazz and the Black Experience with Chicago Soul Spectacular featuring Rashada Dawan 10/17, 7 and 9:30 PM; 10/24, 7 and 9:30 PM; 10/31, 7 and 9:30 PM, Ace Hotel, Prairie Rooftop

Paul Johnson, Victor R, DJ Sheik 10/10, 7 PM, Le Nocturne Chicago

Journeyman (Eric Clapton tribute) 10/22-10/23, 7:30 PM, City Winery, 10/23 sold out ALL

Eugene Kaler and friends 9/23, 6:30 PM, Colvin House ALL

Geordie Kelly & Eric Chial, Geordie Kelly (solo) 9/22, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Davy Knowles 10/2, 7:30 PM, City Winery and 10/3, 4:30 and 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Jon Langford & Sally Timms 10/28, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE

Lisker Music Ensemble 9/25, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/2, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/9, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/16, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/23, 6:30 and 9 PM, Ace Hotel, Prairie Rooftop

Los Gallos 9/25, 8 PM, Montrose Saloon

Lydia Loveless and friends record release show for *Daughter* 9/24, 8:30 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Lydia Loveless (solo) 10/8, 8:30 PM; 10/22, 8:30 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Metropolis String Quartet 10/14, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/21, 6:30 and 9 PM; 10/28, 6:30 and 9 PM, Ace Hotel, Prairie Rooftop

Kevin Morby 9/17, 8 PM; 9/24, 8 PM; 10/1, 8 PM; 10/8, 8 PM; 10/15, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Jason Narducy 10/16, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Nasty Snacks 9/26, 4 PM, Fitz-Gerald's, Berwyn FREE

Okkervil River 10/29, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Passport Vibes Afrobeat Street Festival 6/26/2021, noon, the Promontory ALL

Lawrence Peters Outfit 9/27, 1 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE

Andy Pratt, Joe Policastro 9/23, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Rezn record release for *Chaotic Divine* 9/28, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv ALL

Justin Roberts 9/26, 11 AM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Keith Scott and friends 9/25, 5:30 PM, Reggies' Music Joint FREE

Secret Lives 9/24, 7 PM, Montrose Saloon

Isaiah Sharkey 10/18, 4 and 7:30 PM, City Winery ALL

She Past Away 12/1/2021, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Lenard Simpson Trio 9/30, 6 PM, Montrose Saloon

Stick Men 4/21/2021, 7 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 17+

Deb Talan 10/2, 4:30 and 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston ALL

Bethany Thomas 10/7, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Suzanne Vega 10/7, 8 PM, livestream at seated.com A

Wyatt Waddell 9/26, 1 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn FREE

Dan Whitaker & the Shinebenders 10/2, 7 PM, Montrose Saloon

Whitney 9/23, 8 PM; 9/30, 8 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com ALL

Zachary Williams 10/23, 4:30 and 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, 7 PM sold out ALL

Mike Zito, Ricky Liontones 9/19, 8 PM, Brauerhouse, Lombard

UPDATED

Batu, Hijo Prodigo 10/2, 10 PM, Smart Bar, postponed until a date to be determined

Sarah Brightman 10/15, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, canceled

Bringers, God Awful Small Affairs 11/8, 8 PM, GMan Tavern, date changed

Caribou, Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith 10/22, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, postponed until a date to be determined, 18+

Clannad 9/20/2021, 8 PM, Irish American Heritage Center, rescheduled, 17+

Louis Cole Big Band 4/22/2021, 8 PM, Chop Shop, rescheduled, 18+

Five Finger Death Punch 11/5, 6 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont, canceled

Fleetmac Wood presents Rumours Rave 12/12, 9 PM, Chop Shop, canceled

Freddy Jones Band 6/25/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled ALL

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Heat featuring DJ Ron Carroll and more Thursdays, 7 PM through 12/23, Le Nocturne Chicago, in-person as well as livestream; seating limited

Hyde Park Jazz Festival day one featuring Mike Reed, Tomeka Reid, Jason Adasiewicz Trio's the Silent Hour with Russ Johnson & Jakob Heinemann, Marquis Hill's Circle the Round, Dee Alexander Quartet, Charles Heath Quartet, Greg Ward, Alexis Lombre Quartet 9/26, 4 PM, livestream at hydeparkjazzfestival.org FREE ALL

King Krule, Lucy 12/2, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, canceled

Lil' Ed & the Blues Imperials 9/27, 7:30 PM, City Winery, rescheduled ALL

Lone Bellow 4/8/2021, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, rescheduled, 17+

Memba 3/20/2021, 8 PM, Chop Shop, rescheduled, 18+

Milky Chance 5/4/2021, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, rescheduled; tickets purchased for both the original and previously rescheduled dates will be honored ALL

Monophonics 4/3/2021, 8 PM, Chop Shop, rescheduled, 18+

Mountain Goats 5/17/2021-5/18/2021, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, postponed until a date to be determined ALL

Nowhere FM, Lotus Kid, Blind Adam & the Federal League, Butchered 9/26, 8 PM, GMan Tavern, canceled

Portland Cello Project presents Purple Reign 9/29, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, canceled

Pretty Reckless, Them Evils 10/5, 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, postponed until a date to be determined, 17+

Snow Patrol 10/1/2021, 8 PM, Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, rescheduled ALL

Tribute to Donald Byrd with Kevin Toney, Azar Lawrence, Dominique Toney, Johnny Britt, and more 5/28/2021, 7 and 9:30 PM, The Promontory, rescheduled; 9:30 PM sold out ALL

Velvet Caravan 10/15, 7:30 PM, Tack Room, canceled

Max Weinberg's Jukebox 10/22, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined ALL

Thom Yorke, Sarah Davachi 10/6, 7:30 PM, Auditorium Theatre, canceled

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

RISING CHICAGO hyperpop sensation **Fraxiom** had a hell of a weekend. On Saturday, they performed alongside the likes of Charli XCX, 100 Gecs, Aaron Cartier, and Clairo as part of **Appleville**, a virtual festival organized by PC Music founder A.G. Cook. And on Sunday, Fraxiom dropped their second EP of the year, ***Feeling Cool and Normal***, a deliriously joyful collision of grainy, blown-out bass, jittery synths, chipper vocals pitch-shifted wildly in every direction, and sentimental acoustic strumming—the combination works especially well on "This Guitar," with its "third-wave emo at the rave" vibe.

In 2014 Gossip Wolf covered the debut of **Carmelo Española**'s metal and punk zine, ***Distort/Delay***, but since then he's been so busy making killer music—with menacing industrial duo **Ozzuario** and electronic solo project **Lnr Tmb**—that he hasn't published an issue in four years. Last week Española shared the third *Distort/Delay*, which he's selling in a print edition of 100 for six bucks a pop. It's a quarantine-themed issue, with interviews by Gossip Wolf faves Hide, Brazilian grindcore ghouls Test, São Paulo postpunks Rakta, and more—plus action snaps of live shows by the likes of Boy Harsher, Bloodyminded, and Mystifier. Never has a mosh pit looked so close but felt so far away.

Since late August, **DJ DREAM** has hosted **Vibes on Logan**, an outdoor gathering that celebrates selectors who spin vinyl—he got the idea from the Live on Logan jazz series that Sergio Castro launched on his lawn. Vibes on Logan happens Sunday afternoons on the south half of Logan Boulevard near Rockwell; masks and social distancing are required, and donations to the DJs are encouraged. "Making a community around this event has been pretty extraordinary," DREAM says. "This is the fifth week, and the last weekend was incredible—it was 150 people." DREAM hopes to keep the party going till mid-October, or later if the weather stays nice.

—J.R. Nelson and Leor Galil

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

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NEW TIMES REQUIRE NEW THINKING

Better read this if you are 62 or older and still making mortgage payments.

It's a well-known fact that for many older Americans, the home is their single biggest asset, often accounting for more than 45% of their total net worth. ***And with interest rates near all-time lows while home values are still high, this combination creates the perfect dynamic for getting the most out of your built-up equity.***

But, many aren't taking advantage of this unprecedented period. According to new statistics from the mortgage industry, senior homeowners in the U.S. are now sitting on more than 7.19 trillion dollars* of unused home equity.

Not only are people living longer than ever before, but there is also greater uncertainty in the economy. With home prices back up again, ignoring this "hidden wealth" may prove to be short sighted when looking for the best long-term outcome.

All things considered, it's not surprising that more than a million homeowners have already used a government-insured Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM) loan to turn their home equity into extra cash for retirement.

It's a fact: no monthly mortgage payments are required with a government-insured HECM loan; however the borrowers are still responsible for paying for the maintenance of their home, property taxes, homeowner's insurance and, if required, their HOA fees.

Today, HECM loans are simply an effective way for homeowners 62 and older to get the extra cash they need to enjoy retirement.

Although today's HECM loans have been improved to provide even greater financial protection for homeowners, there are still many misconceptions.

For example, a lot of people mistakenly believe the home must be paid off in full in order to qualify for a HECM loan, which is not the case. In fact, one key advantage of a HECM is that the proceeds will first be used to pay off any existing liens on the property, which frees up cash flow, a huge blessing for seniors living on a fixed income. Unfortunately, many senior homeowners who might be better off with a HECM loan don't even bother to get more information because of rumors they've heard.

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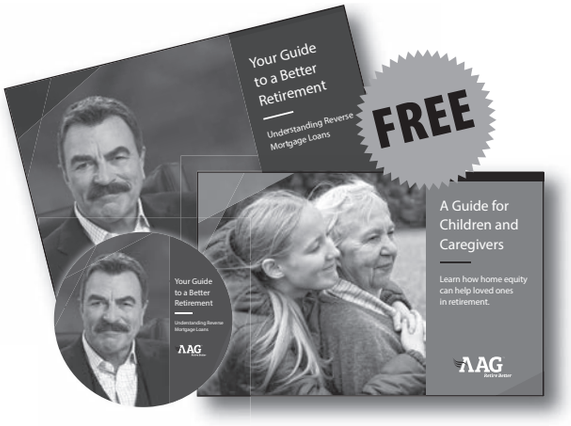
In fact, a recent survey by American Advisors Group (AAG), the nation's number one HECM lender, found that over 98% of their clients are satisfied with their loans. While these special loans are not for everyone, they can be a real lifesaver for senior homeowners - especially in times like these.

The cash from a HECM loan can be used for almost any purpose. Other common uses include making home improvements, paying off medical bills or helping other family members. Some people simply need the extra cash for everyday expenses while others are now using it as a safety net for financial emergencies.

If you're a homeowner age 62 or older, you owe it to yourself to learn more so that you can make the best decision - for your financial future.

We're here and ready to help. Homeowners who are interested in learning more can request a FREE Reverse Mortgage Information Kit and DVD by calling toll-free at 800-660-4493



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OPINION

NATIONAL STAGE

Politics is wrestling

The fights are fake but the folks pulling the strings behind the scenes are real.

By Leonard C. Goodman

Leonard C. Goodman is a Chicago criminal defense attorney and co-owner of the newly independent Reader.

I recall being devastated when I learned that the professional wrestling I watched as a kid was fake. How could combatants show such contempt for their opponents in the ring and yet all work for the same company?

Years later, I felt similar distress when I learned that our national politics is as fake as pro wrestling. On television, our leaders appear to do battle—they tear up speeches, name call, and thump their chests. But behind closed doors, our two dominant political parties are working for the same group of wealthy donors.

As academic studies have shown, the wishes of ordinary Americans have little or no impact on the makings of federal government policy. (The single exception to this rule is for issues that don't impact the bottom line of the investor class, such as reproductive rights and identity politics; on these issues ordinary Americans can sometimes get their voices heard.) In other words, your opinion about most important issues carries zero weight unless you are a major donor or a bundler of donation checks. These truths help explain why the largest voting block in America—nearly half of eligible voters—choose to stay home on election day.

Since the coronavirus forced businesses to shut down, our economy has lost 40 million jobs, and millions more workers have had their wages cut or been forced to work part-time. Desperate to maintain their profits, many large corporations are planning additional massive layoffs. The temporary relief provided to working people included one-time $1,200 stimulus checks and $600 unemployment supplements that expired this summer. Tens of millions of Americans cannot pay their rent and are at risk of eviction. The lockdown has also forced U.S. cities and states to cope with plunging sales and income tax revenue by slashing social services and depleting their pension funds savings to pay bondholders. Many experts are predicting a new pandemic of homelessness if nothing is done.

In this environment, Congress returned from its summer vacation and chose not to help working people. This should not surprise us. The major donors to Congress are doing just fine. They were saved from any loss by the CARES Act passed in March in which, as the rapper Ice Cube recently explained it, "[Congress] just pulled $3 trillion out their ass and gave it to their friends." In fact, the amount injected into financial markets to save their friends, i.e., donors, was closer to $10 trillion when Federal Reserve credit is added to U.S. Treasury allocation.

The country faces other crises. But our leaders' ability to even propose solutions is constrained by their allegiance to the donors. The west coast of the United States is literally on fire due in large part to climate change. Yet neither party will take on fossil fuel production. Republicans deny the science surrounding greenhouse gasses while the Democrats wish away emissions by supporting unproven technologies to capture carbon emissions from ongoing fossil fuel operations. Neither approach comes close to saving the planet.

Most Americans would like to see an end to foreign wars and a reduction in the military budget that consumes over half our country's resources. But these voices cannot be heard because wars are too profitable for the investor class and because the arms manufacturers donate so generously to both political parties. While Democratic lawmakers like to tell viewers of cable news that President Trump is a madman and a Russian agent, they overwhelmingly approved giving him $740.5 billion to wage wars throughout the globe, although Congress has not declared war on another nation since 1942, and despite the Constitution's mandate that Congress must declare war before unleashing death and destruction on other nations.

In 2019, the United States spent more

money on our military than the next ten countries combined. A recent study at Brown University estimated more than 800,000 people dead and 37 million people displaced in U.S.-led wars since 2001, at a cost of $6.4 trillion. As long as the U.S. continues squandering its resources on war, it cannot solve other issues like the destruction of the environment, crumbling infrastructure, access to health care, and education. Yet, because of the war industry's ownership of both political parties, no serious debate is even allowed. Joe Biden has already assured war-industry donors that if he's elected, there will be no major reductions in military spending.

The connection between military spending and the destruction of the planet could not be more clear. The U.S. military is the biggest polluter and consumer of fossil fuels in the world. As Oregon battles the worst wildfires in living memory, more than half of the state's National Guard helicopters are unavailable to help fight the fires as they are deployed in Afghanistan.

At least in professional wrestling, we were allowed an open debate about the merits of corporate ownership of the combatants and about the extent to which the epic battles between the Sheik and Dick the Bruiser were choreographed. But in our national politics, open debate has effectively been squelched because it is too threatening to the donors.

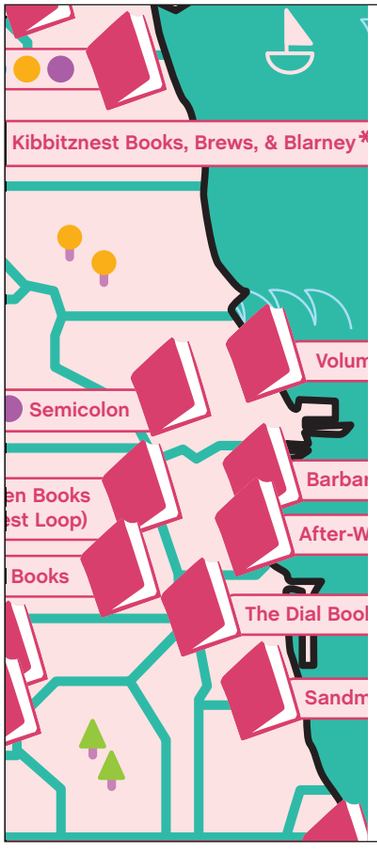
Tens of millions of Americans have lost their health insurance during the pandemic. Yet little debate is permitted in the halls of Congress or in the corporate press about national health coverage or Medicare for All, something every other government in the civilized world provides to its people. Indeed, our neighbor to the north has been far more successful at limiting the spread of COVID-19 than the U.S. due in large part to its universal health care system. As a Canadian health official recently explained, "People [in Canada] don't have to pay for a test," and they aren't "worried that if they got sick they would not be able to get care." Also, the structure of the Canadian system makes it easy for officials to cooperate and consolidate their approach, both nationally and provincially.

But to have an honest debate about health care in the U.S. would threaten the profits of a private health insurance industry that claims a large cut of our health care dollars and imposes on us a nightmarish morass of paperwork and bureaucracy. This useless industry, which provides no actual care for the sick, writes checks to lawmakers in both political parties and is thus protected in the halls of Congress and in the corporate press.

Even in the Democratic Party, where 85 percent of Democratic voters support Medicare for All and where a candidate for president ran on that platform and nearly won the nomination, debate has effectively been suppressed. Some will recall that vice presidential nominee Senator Kamala Harris was once a cosponsor of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders's Medicare for All bill in the Senate. But she quickly reversed her position, presumably after hearing from the major Democratic donors. This betrayal of the people didn't earn her many votes in the presidential primary. But it did earn her a spot on the party's national ticket. At last month's Democratic National Convention, any discussion of Medicare for All was effectively prohibited. Even Senator Sanders was not allowed to discuss his signature issue during his speech at the convention. Further, the party's leaders successfully defeated an attempt to include the overwhelmingly popular proposal in the party's platform.

There is one group of Americans, besides mega-donors, who have the power to get their voices heard. They are professional athletes. Last month, Milwaukee Bucks players went on strike to protest the Kenosha police shooting of Jacob Blake. There was reportedly significant momentum among a certain group of players to walk away from the season to protest police brutality and the disproportionate use of deadly force by cops against Black men and women. So serious was the threat posed by these players that former President Barack Obama was enlisted to talk the players out of striking. While the NBA season was saved, the episode showed the potential power of professional athletes who someday might join with the voiceless majority of Americans to demand some of the things the big-money political donors won't let us have; such as health care, jobs, a living wage, the preservation of the planet earth, and an end to foreign wars.

@GoodmanLen



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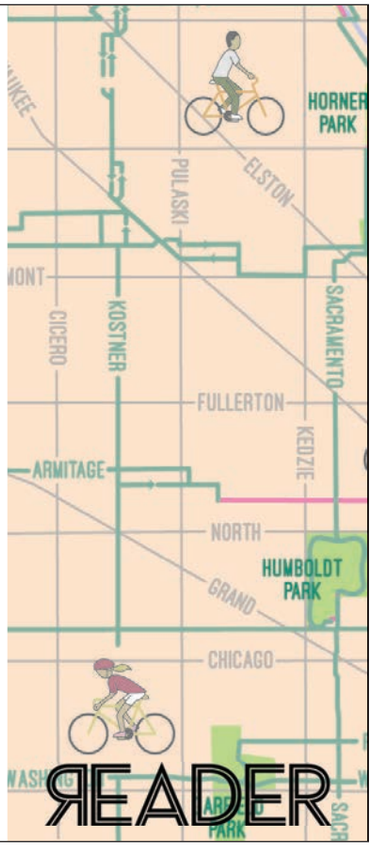

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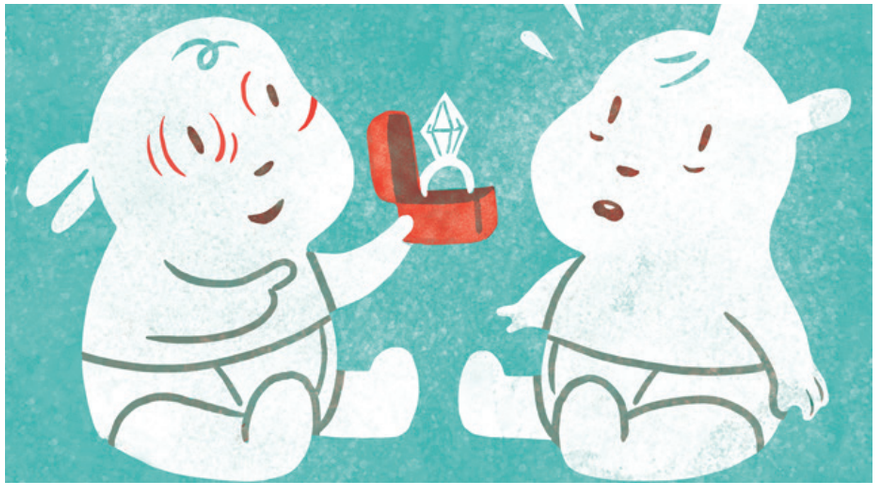
OPINION



JOE NEWTON

SAVAGE LOVE

I only want you to love me forever

Demands for premature commitments are often red flags for abuse.

By Dan Savage

Q: I'm a straight man who's been dating a woman for not quite four months. In the beginning things were light. But things started to get heavy quickly. Two weeks in she revealed her very serious abandonment issues and then began asking me whether I really loved her and demanding reassurance that I wasn't going anywhere and she wouldn't be "just a single chapter" in my life. After a month, I met her seven-year-old son, her parents, and her ex. Then we had a pregnancy scare. She told me that if she was pregnant she would keep it because then I would have to stay. That alarmed me. I voiced that we'd been dating for a very short time and this wasn't a good time for either of us to have a child. She wasn't pregnant, luckily. Even before this incident, my body had started to manifest signs of anxiety—upset stomach, sleepless nights, loss of appetite, etc. So, I summoned all of my courage (conversations like this are *extremely* difficult for me) and told her that I couldn't do this anymore. She started to cry and begged me to give her a second chance. I wound up spending the rest of the weekend at her place and agreed to stay in the relationship. But I didn't feel good about it. When I finally got back to my place, I felt anxious, confused, hollow, and hopeless. I tried to end things again after speaking to my therapist, but she won't take no for an answer and constantly brings up the promises I made about really loving her. I hate this and I feel terrible for her son. Any thoughts on how to dismantle this thing? Or do I just need to run? —**Passionate Reassurances Extracted So Soon Undoes Relationship Exit**

A: As I explained to a reader in a similar situation: "We need someone's consent before we kiss them, suck them, fuck them, spank them, spoon them, marry them, collar them, etc. But we do not need someone's consent to leave them. Breakups are the only aspect of our romantic lives where the other person's consent is *irrelevant*. The other person's pain is relevant, of course, and we should be as compassionate and considerate as possible when ending a relationship. (Unless we're talking about dumping an abuser, in which case safety and self-care are all that matters.) But we don't need someone's consent to dump them."

Voice that it's over, PRESSURE, and then refuse to get drawn into negotiations about whether it's over. It's over. If she needs to cry on someone's shoulder, she'll have to call a friend. And if she brings up the promises you made after she "revealed" her abandonment issues weeks into this relationship, apologize for not being strong enough to resist her obvious—if possibly subconscious—efforts to manipulate you. She shouldn't have asked you to swear your undying love after you'd known each other for such a short time and you shouldn't have

made the promises you did. You failed her *and* yourself by not telling her it was too soon for that shit—too soon to say "I love you," too soon to know whether she would be a chapter in your life, too soon to meet her son (!), her parents (!!), and her ex (!!!).

Demands for premature reassurances of everlasting love, like all demands for premature commitments, are intended to make exiting the relationship more difficult. Not for the person making the demands, of course; they're always free to go. They make it more difficult for the person those demands are being made of to go. And while I'm not calling your girlfriend an abuser, demands for premature commitments are often red flags for abuse; being asked to make a premature commitment after a few weeks or months—by moving in together or adopting a dog or (God forbid) getting married—makes it infinitely harder for a person to leave once the mask slips and they see the abuser lurking behind it. Again, I don't think your girlfriend is an abuser, but she weaponized her insecurities ("It's nice to meet you, now let me tell you about my abandonment issues!") to extract what amounts to premature commitment from you. And she involved her son in that effort, which is really unconscionable. And while that's on her, PRESSURE, not you, you should've refused to meet her son so quickly and seen her desire to introduce you to him as a red flag.

Learn the lessons, PRESSURE: When someone you've only recently started dating says, "Will you love me forever?," the correct answer is never, "Of course I will!" The correct answer is always, "I think you're a wonderful person and I want to keep seeing you, but we can't know—at this stage—what the future will bring." If they respond by saying, "You know what? You're right," keep seeing them. If they respond by melting down and bringing up their abandonment issues, well, they've just demonstrated that they aren't someone you would want a future with.

And finally, I'm #TeamAmanza on the issue of meeting a new partner's children from a previous relationship. You should be seeing someone for at least six months to a year—you should be well out of the honeymoon phase if not quite into the farting-in-front-of-each-other phase—before being introduced to your new partner's kid(s).

Q: I'm a 32-year-old straight man dating a 31-year-old straight woman. We've been seeing each other for eight months and became "Facebook official" (if that's still a thing) in June. We are both in our first serious relationship after being divorced from relatively long marriages. (Me: eight years, two kids. Her: ten years, no kids.) My question is when does suspicion—suspicion of cheating—become something you should bring up? I tend to spill everything that's going on in my life, which she says she appreciates but isn't used to doing. She's a very independent person, which I've never experienced before. It's refreshing to know that my partner has her own friends, but there are moments when I get stonewalled. Sometimes I get vague answers or no answers about where she is or who she's with. She often tells me she "accidentally" turned off her notifications. Sometimes she will say she's staying in and then I later find out that she went out. Maybe I'm taking things way too seriously considering the amount of time we've been together but I feel I have to take things seriously since kids are involved. —THE ABSENT GIRLFRIEND

A: The uncharitable read: Your hunch is correct and your new girlfriend is being cagey about where she's going and who she's with because she's cheating on you.

The charitable read: Your new girlfriend is 31 years old, she was married for ten years, and you've been dating for eight months. Math has never been my strong suit but assuming her marriage didn't end five minutes before you met, TAG, your girlfriend married very young. Which means she spent her entire adult life—most or all of her 20s and possibly a chunk of her teens—having to answer to a spouse. She only recently began to experience the kind of autonomy most of us get to enjoy before we marry and settle down (*if* we marry and settle down), TAG, and she may be reluctant to surrender that autonomy so shortly after achieving it.

She may also have different ideas about what being Facebook official means. Does that mean you're monogamous? If it does, does she define monogamy the same way you do? Some other questions: Was going Facebook official your idea or her idea? Did you ask for a premature commitment? You're only eight months in—is it possible you involved your kids too soon?

You obviously need to have a conversation with your girlfriend—if you can get her on the phone—about your expectations and definitions. If you expect her to let you know where she is at all times and who she's with, TAG, make that clear. But if that is what you expect, well, here's hoping she dumps you. Because even if you lived together, even if you were married, even if she wanted to spend the rest of her life with you, your girlfriend would still be entitled to a little privacy and her autonomy.

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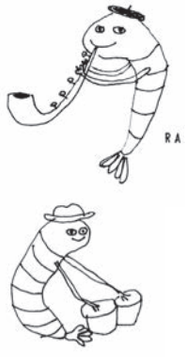

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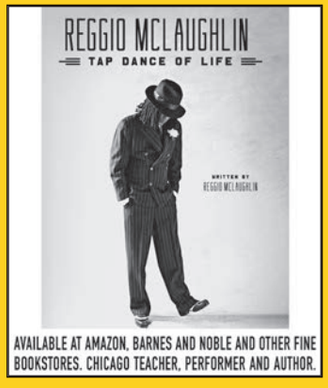

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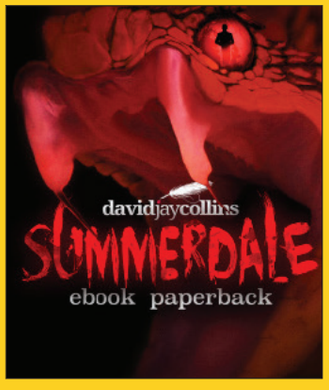

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